

Obama Signs \$1.1T Budget, Avoids Holiday Shutdown

WASHINGTON (AP) - President Barack Obama has signed a \$1.1 trillion measure that will boost spending for defense and non-defense programs over the coming year. Republican leaders and the White House have said they feel good about the outcome and have described the deal as the best they could do under divided government. The



President Barack Obama puts the cap back on the pen after signing the budget in the Oval Office of the White House, Friday, Dec. 18, 2015, in Washington.

(AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

president fended off any array of riders that included efforts to halt federal money for Planned Parenthood and place greater

restrictions on Syrian refugees. Republicans secured an end to the ban on most crude oil exports. Congress also extended

\$680 billion in tax cuts for businesses and individuals, with the White House in particular touting the tax breaks for the wind and so-

lar industry.

The signing of the budget bill caps months of negotiations and averts a government shutdown. □

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'Agreement' on UN draft on Syria; no mention of Assad

EDITH M. LEDERER
CARA ANNA
Associated Press
UNITED NATIONS (AP) — U.N. Security Council members agreed Friday on a resolution on a peace

bassadors to the U.N. both expressed optimism ahead of the Security Council meeting, set for 4 p.m. (2100 GMT). The draft resolution, obtained by The Associated

The draft also says cease-fire efforts should move forward in parallel with the talks, and it asks Ban to report within a month of the resolution's adoption on a way to monitor the cease-

each country of groups they consider terrorist organizations. He said some countries "sent 10, 15, 20 names" and others more. "Now I think there will be follow-up steps in terms of countries meeting again to set criteria which will help filter the list," said Judeh, whose country is tasked with putting the final list together. Others around the table included the United States, key European nations, Saudi Arabia and top Syria allies Russia and Iran. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the two most important issues are launching political negotiations among Syrian parties and implementing a U.N.-monitored cease-fire. "Without peace talks, the cease-fire cannot be sustained. Without a cease-fire, peace talks cannot continue to produce results," he said. Wang noted the "severe threat posed by international terrorism," a reference to the Islamic State group, which has exploited the chaos to seize large parts of Syria. A peace plan agreed to last month by 20 nations meeting in Vienna sets a Jan. 1 deadline for the start of negotiations between Assad's government and opposition groups. That deadline is "too ambitious a timetable," the U.N. representative for the Syrian National Coalition, the main Western-backed opposition group, told reporters Friday. Najib Ghabdian estimated that a month of preparation is needed.



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, left, talks with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon after a photo session before their meeting on Syria at the United Nations, Friday, Dec. 18, 2015. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

process for Syria involving talks by representatives of the Damascus government and the opposition, but the draft says nothing on the critical issue of what role President Bashar Assad will play. Diplomats had rushed to overcome divisions on the draft resolution while world powers held the latest talks on how to bring an end to the conflict, which is deep into its fifth year with well over 300,000 killed. The resolution has been described as a rare gesture of unity on the Syria peace process by a council often deeply divided on the crisis. The U.S. and French am-

Press, requests that U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon convene representatives of the Syrian government and opposition "to engage in formal negotiations on a political transition process on an urgent basis, with a target of early January 2016 for the initiation of talks." Within six months, the process should establish "credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance," with U.N.-supervised "free and fair elections" to be held within 18 months. The draft calls the transition Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, stressing that the "Syrian people will decide the future of Syria."

fire. The draft notes that the cease-fire "will not apply to offensive or defensive actions" against groups considered terrorist organizations, meaning that airstrikes by Russia, France and the U.S.-led coalition apparently would not be affected. Meanwhile Friday, some 20 foreign ministers tackled those and other difficult issues for a possible end to Syria's civil war, including sorting out which Syrian groups will represent the opposition in peace talks in the new year. Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh said he presented lists submitted from

Carter to review Afghan security as violence rises

LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press
JALALABAD, Afghanistan (AP) — Defense Secretary Ash Carter told his Afghan counterpart Friday that the United States is "with you," committed to supporting Afghan security forces and building their capabilities for years to come. Carter made a one-day visit to Afghanistan to assess the fragile security situation, amid reports of increased violence and a growing campaign by Islamic State loyalists to gain a foothold in the eastern part of the country. "We're with you. We stand by you," Carter told Afghanistan's Acting Defense Minister Masoom Stankzai during a news conference at Operating Base Fenty in Jalalabad. Carter's visit comes as his top commander there, Gen. John Campbell, voiced concerns that foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq are joining with Afghans who have declared loyalty to IS in the east, near the Pakistan border. Officials have been warning for some time that while the presence of IS has been small, about 1,000 to 3,000 troops, it is attracting disaffected members of the Taliban. Carter said the Islamic State is "trying to create little nests where they feel there is an opportunity." He said the U.S. is trying to make sure they don't gain a foothold, particularly in nearby Nangahar Province. Fueling those concerns is a new Pentagon report saying that the Taliban has been emboldened by the reduced U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and attacks increased this year.

There are about 600 U.S. troops at Fenty, one of the key bases where American troops will remain beyond 2016. Other bases have been shut down across the country as the number of U.S. and coalition forces has dropped in recent years. Overall, there are about 14,000 U.S. and coalition troops in the country.

Assad makes rare public visit at Damascus church

ALBERT AJI
BASSEM MROUE
Associated Press
DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Airstrikes in Syria reportedly carried out by Russian warplanes killed at least 14 people on Friday, according to activists, while President Bashar Assad made a rare public appearance at a church in the capital, Damascus, attending preparations for Christmas Eve, his office said.

The airstrikes took place in the northwestern rebel-held town of Jisr al-Shughour and the casualties included women and children, two activist groups said. One of the groups, the Local Coordination Committees, said the air raids were carried out by Russian warplanes and struck residential buildings. The group said 17 people were killed. The other group, the Brit-

ain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the airstrikes killed 14 people. One of the killed women was pregnant, the Observatory said. Meanwhile, a photograph released by Assad's office showed the president and his wife, Asma, inside the Notre Dame de Damas Church in the capital. The president chatted with men and women and listened to their recitals of

poems, media in Damascus said. Assad has been making rare public appearances as the fighting around the country intensifies and rebels outside Damascus have been hitting the city with mortar shells. Earlier Friday, a top Syrian opposition figure said in Saudi Arabia said Assad should have no role during a transitional period to end the country's civil war.



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Sanders camp says Democratic group 'undermining' campaign

KEN THOMAS

LISA LERER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign angrily accused the Democratic Party of "taking our campaign hostage" on Friday after it was temporarily barred from accessing a trove of information about potential voters as punishment for improperly accessing data compiled by the campaign of rival Hillary Clinton.

The incident interrupted a period in which Democrats were sailing toward a peaceful primary season, with Clinton comfortably ahead of Sanders nationally in a campaign that harbors little of the discord



Sen. Bernie Sanders' campaign manager Jeff Weaver, speaks during a news conference at the Bernie 2016 Campaign Office in Washington, Friday, Dec. 18, 2015. Weaver says the Democratic National Committee is "actively attempting to undermine" Sanders' White House bid.

(AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

and discontent roiling the Republican Party.

The reaction of the Demo-

cratic National Committee to the data breach, the depth of which was

debated by all involved, thrust into the open long-standing suspicions among

Sanders and his supporters that the national party is unfairly working to support the candidacy of its front-runner.

"Clearly, in this case, they are trying to help the Clinton campaign," said Sanders campaign manager Jeff Weaver, who threatened to file a lawsuit against the DNC as soon as Friday afternoon, unless the party backed down. DNC Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz responded that "the Sanders campaign had inappropriately and systematically accessed Clinton campaign data," rejecting Weaver's effort to portray the breach as the fault of a software glitch and a small group of rogue staffers. □



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Obama says he won't fade away in final year in office



President Barack Obama speaks during a news conference in the White House Brady Press Briefing Room in Washington, Friday, Dec. 18, 2015. Obama sought to lay the groundwork Friday for his last year in office by vowing not to fade in the background but instead use his remaining months to push longstanding goals to fruition. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

JULIE PACE

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

President Barack Obama sought to lay the groundwork Friday for his last year in office by vowing not to fade in the background but instead use his remaining months to push longstanding goals to fruition.

"In 2016, I'm going to leave it all out on the field," he said. "Wherever there's an opportunity, I'm going to take it."

In his annual year-end news conference, Obama portrayed 2015 as one of significant progress for

his agenda, pointing to diplomacy with Iran and Cuba, Asia-Pacific trade agreement and an unprecedented global climate treaty as big wins for his administration. He also praised a Supreme Court ruling legalizing gay marriage..

Still, he said, he plans to do much more in 2016.

"I said at the beginning of this year that interesting stuff happens in the fourth quarter — and we are only halfway through," Obama said.

The end of 2015 marks a major transition point for

the president, who has one year left to try to finish as many of his projects as possible. He won't be rolling out sweeping new policy proposals that would be unlikely to get serious consideration amid the focus on electing his successor. The White House is promising Obama will deliver a "non-traditional" State of the Union address in January laying out an agenda that includes further executive steps on climate change and gun control.

Amid widespread fears about terrorism and ex-

tremists, Obama pushed back against critics questioning his strategy for overcoming the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria. "There's only so much bombing you can do," he said, though he insisted anew, "We will defeat ISIS."

He also affirmed his longstanding position that Syrian President Bashar Assad must leave power for Syria to resolve its civil war, even though his administration has recently said it could accept an unspecified transition period during which Assad stayed.

Still, Obama contended about Syria, "Five years later, I was right."

Calling attention to his signature legislative achievement, Obama announced that 6 million people had signed up for health care so far this year under the Affordable Care Act, a surge that officials say illustrates the program's durability.

After the news conference, Obama was to depart for San Bernardino, California, where he planned to meet with families of the 14 victims of the recent mass shooting. He then will fly to Hawaii where he'll spend two weeks on vacation with his wife and daughters in what has become a family Christmas tradition before returning to the White House in January.

Hours before his depart-

ture, Congress passed a major bipartisan budget package that staved off a potential government shutdown and extended tax cuts for both families and businesses. The White House has indicated Obama will sign it.

Obama said lawmakers had ended the year on a "high note" with additional legislation on transportation and education. He noted optimistically that by averting a funding crisis for the next nine months, Congress had cleared a path for cooperation with him next year on areas of common ground.

"Congress and I have a long runway to get some things done for the American people," he said. He pointed to a potential criminal justice overhaul and congressional consideration of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact as areas ripe for cooperation. Obama said he'd present a long-delayed plan to close the detention centers at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to Congress early next year, then wait for lawmakers' reaction before determining whether to take action on his own to shut it. He predicted the prison population would dwindle by early next year to less than 100, a threshold his administration has been pushing for to bolster its argument that keeping the facility open isn't cost effective. □



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Pharma's bad boy: Livestreaming, rap-fan CEO faces charges

JENNIFER PELTZ
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — He's the enfant terrible of pharmaceuticals, a 32-year-old CEO who unapologetically raised the price of the only approved drug for a rare disease from \$13.50 to \$750 per pill.

He's a millionaire music aficionado who riled rap fans by buying the only known copy of an album by the Wu-Tang Clan. He's an unabashed self-promoter who livestreams his daily life and boasts he's "the world's most eligible bachelor" and "the most successful Albanian to ever walk the face of this Earth." And he's an equally unabashed provocateur who jousts online with his critics. Now, prosecutors say Mar-



Martin Shkreli, the former hedge fund manager under fire for buying a pharmaceutical company and ratcheting up the price of a life-saving drug, is escorted by law enforcement agents in New York Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015, after being taken into custody following a securities probe.

(AP Photo/Craig Ruttle)

tin Shkreli is a fraudster. He pleaded not guilty Thursday to charges that he looted Retrophin, a pharmaceutical company he founded,

of \$11 million to pay back disgruntled hedge fund clients. By Friday, he was out on \$5 million bail and back on

YouTube, ready anew for his self-created close-up.

"Sorry I didn't livestream yesterday," he said. "I had a lot going on."

Combative, often crass and willfully sophomoric, Shkreli has — so far — appeared to revel in being described as a "pharma bro," the "drug industry's villain" and far more unprintable terms since his Turing Pharmaceuticals jacked up the price of Daraprim. It treats a rare parasitic disease that strikes pregnant women, cancer patients and AIDS patients. (The criminal case doesn't involve Turing or Daraprim. Shkreli said on his livestream Friday that he couldn't discuss the allegations; instead, he thanked supporters.)

He defends the decision as capitalism at work and says insurance and other programs ensure that people who need Daraprim will ultimately get it.

But it sparked outrage that resounded from medical centers to the presidential campaign: Hillary Clinton termed it price-gouging, while Donald Trump called Shkreli "a spoiled brat."

Shkreli grew up in Brooklyn, the son of immigrant parents who worked at janitorial jobs. He attended New York's Hunter College High School, a selective, rigorous public school. He has said he stopped going to class and didn't graduate, though he evidently bears no ill will: His foundation recently gave the school \$1 million. He's said he later earned a finance degree from the city's Baruch College. "I always wanted to start a public company and make a lot of money," Shkreli told Bloomberg Businessweek in 2014.

A teenage internship at a hedge fund got his foot in Wall Street's door. By his

early 20s, Shkreli had his own hedge fund — and had a reputation as an outspoken short seller, or investor who bets a stock's price will decline.

His approach earned the enmity of companies whose prospects he had publicly impugned and doomed his first hedge fund when one bet proved wrong. Undeterred, Shkreli launched a new fund — it also collapsed, prosecutors say — and launched himself in 2011 into the pharmaceuticals business as CEO of Retrophin, which also has drawn scrutiny over sharp drug price increases. The publicly traded company ousted him last year.

Some complaints about his management were oddly personal: An ex-employee at one of his hedge funds has said in civil court papers that Shkreli sent his wife and sons such messages as: "I hope to see you and your four children homeless and will do whatever I can to assure this." The disclosure came in a suit — against the ex-employee, whom Shkreli had accused of theft. It was eventually settled.

"I had two guys parked outside of his house for six months" watching him, Shkreli told the rap news site HipHopDX in a tough-talking, expletive-filled interview published Wednesday, the day before his arrest. A music fan since his days in a high school rock band, Shkreli recently emerged as the \$2 million buyer of the sole copy of what's been called the world's rarest album: the Wu-Tang Clan's "Once Upon a Time in Shaolin," which the group auctioned to only one person on the condition that it not be put to commercial use. □



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US Financial Front:

Spending bill may aid economy just as Fed is pulling back

C. S. RUGABER

AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Just as the Federal Reserve is pulling back slightly on the economic accelerator, Congress is pressing down a bit harder.

The spending and tax-cut package that Congress approved Friday stands to modestly boost growth next year. It could also help drive a shift away from government as a drag on economic growth to a source of potential stimulus.

"This shift ... is currently being overlooked by financial markets and analysts," said Joseph Carson, U.S. economist at asset manager Alliance Bernstein. "But we believe this will be a key aspect of a more positive and faster growth environment for next year."

Economists at Goldman Sachs have forecast that increased federal spending and tax cuts should add to economic growth in 2016 for the first time in six years.

The \$1.1 trillion budget deal boosts spending for most Cabinet agencies by

about 6 percent next year. A separate tax measure provides \$680 billion in tax cuts over 10 years. It would do so mostly by extending or making permanent about 50 different expiring tax breaks.

That measure follows Congress' approval of a five-year, \$305 billion highway bill earlier in December.

Taken together, the measures could increase growth to about 3 percent next year, Carson estimates, up from a likely pace of about 2.25 percent this year.

Alec Phillips, an economist at Goldman Sachs, forecasts a smaller gain and envisions overall growth next year of 2.25 percent. The picture now looks brighter for state and local governments, too. Their tax revenue has increased as the economy has improved. The economy now has about 4.5 million more jobs than it did before the Great Recession began in late 2007.

Spending on construction at all levels of government, for example, rose 6.1 per-

cent in October compared with a year earlier. Additional government spending can also translate into more purchases of military equipment. The economic lift from government, if it proved significant and if it raised undesirably low inflation, could make it easier for the Fed to continue raising short-term interest rates. On Wednesday, citing the improved economy, the Fed announced its first rate increase in nine years. For seven years, the central bank had kept its key short-term rate at a record low near zero to encourage borrowing and spending. Fed Chair Janet Yellen's predecessor, Ben Bernanke, had frequently called on Congress to limit its budget cuts in the short run to help the economy recover. But in recent months Yellen has noted that governments at all levels were spending a bit



Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen speaks during a news conference in Washington, following an announcement that the Federal Reserve raised its key interest rate by quarter-point, heralding higher lending rates in an economy much sturdier than the one the Fed helped rescue in 2008.

(AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

more. That likely helped set the stage for the Fed's rate increases. "Fiscal policy actions at both the federal and the state and local levels look like they are no longer a significant drag on economic growth," Yellen said in May. The Fed said Wednesday that any rate hikes next year would likely

be gradual and that it may delay further increases if the economy weakens. The Fed's interest rate target will likely remain below its longer-run average all next year, Yellen said, meaning that consumer borrowing rates should also remain at historically low levels. □



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EU leaders vow 'uncompromising fight' against terrorism



French President Francois Hollande speaks during a media conference at the conclusion of an EU summit in Brussels on Friday, Dec. 18, 2015. European Union leaders reconvened in Brussels for the final day of their year-end summit with a wide-ranging agenda including how to build greater economic unity among their 28 countries and stepping up the fight against extremism.
 (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)

JOHN DAHLBURG
Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Shocked by the bloody Paris attacks, European Union leaders on Friday vowed an "uncompromising fight against terrorism" and called for wide-

ranging countermeasures ranging from beefed-up immigration controls to a crackdown on illicit weapons-trafficking. Leaders of the 28 EU member countries also pledged quick action to better re-

strict violent extremists' ability to finance their actions, including via the imposition of asset freezes. The Brussels summit was the first time the EU leaders had assembled since the Nov. 13 attacks, claimed by the

Islamic State organization, that killed 130 and wounded hundreds more in Paris. Those attacks "have only strengthened our resolve to continue our uncompromising fight against terrorism and to make full use of all the tools at our disposal, including close coordination with key partners such as the United States," EU leaders said in a joint statement. They also agreed it was crucial to implement systematic and coordinated border checks at European countries' external frontiers in order to know who is coming and going, and promised to rapidly review proposals by the EU's executive arm to clamp down on the illegal sale of firearms, especially the models of high-powered semi-automatic weapons used by some of the Paris attackers. "We face a common threat," British Prime Minister David Cameron told

a post-summit news conference. "No one country can defeat it alone. We have to defeat it together." The British leader said that to better neutralize the threat of violent extremist groups like Islamic State, Europe needs more systematic sharing of information, better cooperation in the field of aviation security, coordinated efforts to choke off the targeted groups' financing and propaganda, and a clamp-down on explosives. At the EU summit, "we got very clear agreement here to take forward all of these proposals," Cameron said. Last month's coordinated attacks on Paris restaurants and cafes, a theater and a suburban soccer stadium highlighted the ready availability in Europe of military assault rifles, as well as gaps in the immigration and customs checks that allow even people subject to international search warrants to travel unhindered.

Twenty-two EU countries belong to the so-called Schengen zone, where no visa is needed to journey between one member nation and another. Recent history, though, indicates progress in the counterterrorism field can be slow. After the Jan. 7-9 earlier attacks in Paris, a summit called for a strong directive to allow the exchange of data on air passengers. But it may not be until next February that such a system is given final approval by the European Parliament. "It's simply not enough to proclaim, to decide it's a matter of putting things into effect," French President Francois Hollande told reporters Friday.

Cameron confident he'll get EU reforms next year

LORNE COOK
JILL LAWLESS
Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — British Prime Minister David Cameron says he's confident the European Union will agree to the reforms he is seeking next year, indicating he may call a referendum on Britain's membership well before his self-imposed end-of-2017 deadline. Cameron spoke Friday after a two-day summit at which he outlined Britain's demands for reform of the 28-nation bloc. His most contentious goal is to reduce immigration from other EU nations by barring migrants from receiving some benefits until they have been in Britain for four

years. Britain claims its schools, hospitals and welfare system have been strained by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Eastern Europe over the last decade. But Cameron's proposed welfare curb is strongly opposed by some other EU leaders, who see it as violating the fundamental principle of free movement among the bloc's member states. Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydlo said Cameron's benefits-limiting proposals "are not acceptable to Poland." "We are open to discussion and compromise," she said. "But today many well-

educated Polish people live in the U.K. and work there and are building the GDP of Great Britain." No formal alternative proposal was put forward at the meeting. But Cameron said the summit had brought the EU "a step closer to agreement on the significant and far-reaching reforms that I've proposed." He said 2016 "will be the year that we achieve something really vital, fundamentally changing the U.K.'s relationship with the EU and finally addressing the concerns of the British people about our membership. "Then it will be for the British

people to decide whether we remain or leave," added Cameron. Cameron says he will argue to stay as long as he gets a new deal for Britain, but a strong contingent within his Conservative Party favors leaving the EU. Many British business leaders, however, warn that having Britain leave the EU would devastate London's standing as a global financial center. Cameron's goal is to get agreement at a Feb. 18-19 summit, which could mean a referendum as early as June. The mood after Thursday's late-night summit meeting in Brussels was that a deal might be possible.

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Jordan starts deporting Sudanese asylum seekers

KARIN LAUB
JAMEY KEATEN
Associated Press

AMMAN, Jordan (AP) — Jordan on Friday began deporting hundreds of Sudanese asylum seekers, despite warnings by the U.N. refugee agency that they could face danger and persecution in their troubled homeland.

Jordanian security forces rounded up about 800 Sudanese earlier this week, with the intention of deporting them. Troops tore down their makeshift tent camp in the capital Amman, and detained them at a holding bay near the country's international airport.

The deportations epitomized dilemmas faced by many European, Mideast and African countries that have faced a refugee influx in recent years. Jordan has otherwise drawn plaudits from U.N. officials for being more welcoming than most by taking in many Iraqis, Syrians and Palestinians.

In Geneva, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres said the world community had a "huge debt" to Jordan but also noted the incident over the Sudanese.

"We have been in close contact with the Jordanian government on the Sudanese question," said Guterres, said UNHCR's position was that the Sudanese in need of protection should not be deported.

The deportations began early Friday and most of those slated for deportation were to be flown out of Jordan throughout the day, said government spokesman Mohammed Momani. By noon, three planes with 430 Sudanese on board had left, said Aoife McDonnell, a refugee agency spokeswoman in Jordan. She said the agency is "ex-

tremely concerned" about others held at the loading bay.

A Sudanese activist in Jordan who was in touch with some of his countrymen in detention said at one point, they staged a protest and that Jordanian forces responded with tear gas and beatings. The activist only gave a partial name, Abu Ehab. His claim could not immediately be confirmed. McDonnell said UNHCR has registered more than 3,500 Sudanese in Jordan. Of those, 58 percent were recognized as refugees and the rest as asylum seekers. She noted that all those registered with the agency in the two categories enjoy international protection, adding that 70 percent are from Sudan's troubled Darfur region.

"We believe many, if not most" of those being deported were registered with the agency, she said. Guterres, whose 10-year tenure ends on Dec. 31, also expressed concern about growing wariness worldwide about refugees and noted a "trend toward a more restrictive approach to refugee policies." He cited contributing factors such as public reaction to the large number of refugees pouring into Europe and concerns about security in the wake of terror attacks in Paris and elsewhere recently.

"We need to understand that refugees are the first victims of terror, and they are refugees exactly because they are fleeing areas where terrorism, violence and other forms of persecution have been proliferating more strongly," he said.

UNHCR has tried to halt Jordan's deportations to Sudan, saying the Sudanese asylum seekers risk possible persecution there and that



A general view of the U.N. refugee agency headquarters after troops tore down the tents the Sudanese had pitched a month ago to press demands for resettlement to a third country, in Amman, Jordan. Jordan on Friday began deporting hundreds of Sudanese asylum seekers, despite warnings by the U.N. refugee agency that they could face danger and persecution in their troubled homeland.

(AP Photo/ Raad Adayleh)

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Chinese online lender seized, depositors demand money back

JOE McDONALD
AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Yang Ying, an art teacher in north-eastern China, entrusted 480,000 yuan (\$76,000) to a major Internet-based lender, Ezubo, after seeing advertisements on state television, which she took as a sign it was safe.

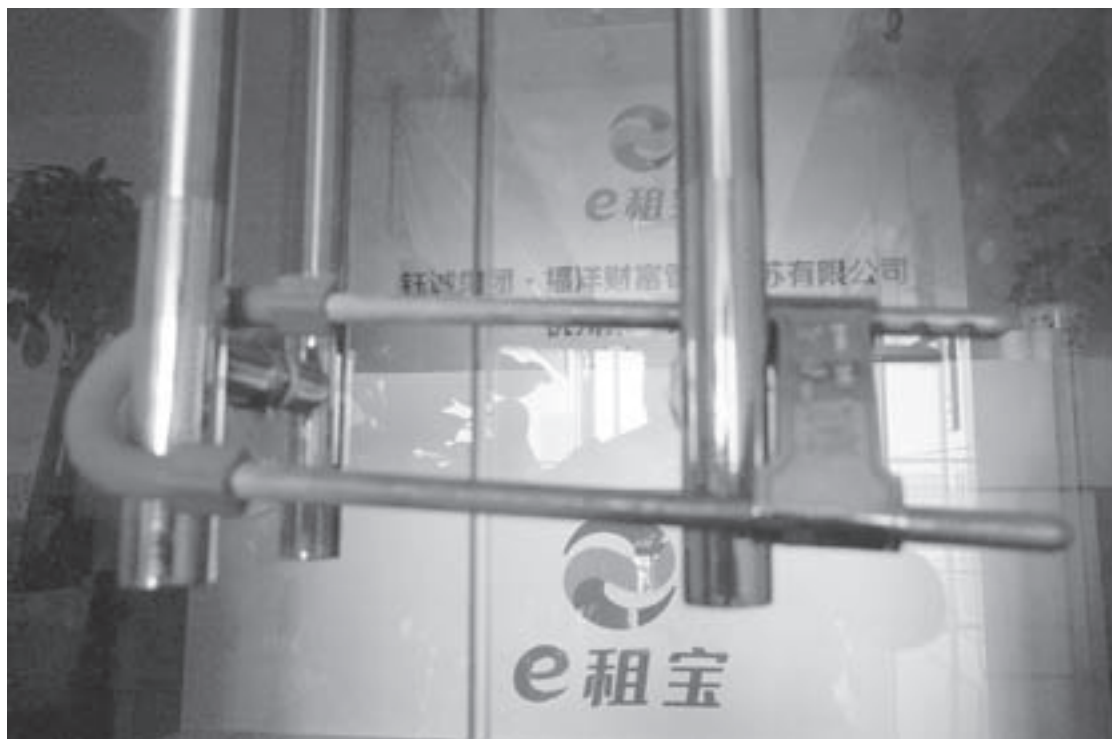
Just a week later, she was horrified to see news reports that Ezubo, which collected billions of dollars in deposits, had been raided by police who froze a bank account and detained executives. She called city hall in her hometown of Changchun and was told to hire a lawyer, but says she cannot afford that while her money is tied up in Ezubo.

Yang, 31, said she saw Ezubo's advertising on state broadcaster CCTV right before the evening news, but "what really persuaded me is the advertising on the variety show on Anhui Satellite TV," a prominent regional broadcaster. "Pretty famous stars are on that program," she said.

The seizure of Ezubo has added to tensions over

private sector Chinese finance companies that have been battered by a wave of defaults due to an economic slump, triggering protests by depositors. Regulators allowed private sector lending to flourish with little oversight over the past decade to support entrepreneurs who create China's new jobs and wealth but are largely shut out of lending by the state-owned banking industry. Regulators tightened controls after declining economic growth led to defaults and protests. The finance industry as a whole has come under tougher scrutiny after a plunge in stock prices in June led to accusations of insider trading and other offenses.

Ezubo was seized Dec. 8 on suspicion of raising money without the required licenses, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. The business magazine Caixin reported the chairman of its parent company, Yucheng International Holdings Group Ltd., was detained by police and 40 to 50 other employees were questioned.



In this Thursday Dec. 17, 2015 photo, the office of Ezubo is locked after a police raid, in Hangzhou in east China's Zhejiang province. Major Internet-based lender, Ezubo, which collected billions of dollars in deposits, was raided by police who froze a bank account and detained executives. (Chinatopix via AP)

Authorities are scrambling to head off possible protests over Ezubo, which news reports say had 4.9 million depositors, making it much larger than other private lenders that have run into trouble.

Ezubo collected a total of 74.7 billion yuan (\$11.8 billion) in deposits since its founding on Feb. 25, 2014, according to Xincainet, a financial information website. Other news reports gave similar figures but none said how much the company owed to depositors at the time it was seized. According to Caixin, police ordered CITIC Bank to freeze a 1.1 billion

yuan (\$175 million) deposit belonging to another Yucheng subsidiary.

Depositors from other parts of China have traveled to Beijing to protest at government offices and the headquarters of China Central Television, according to Yin Jun, an employee of a solar power company in the eastern province of Jiangsu. "The police called to warn me not to complain about the Communist Party in the WeChat group," said Yin, referring to a popular messaging app.

Yin, 22, said he also had been reassured about Ezubo because of its advertisements on CCTV and

aboard the national bullet train network. "We contacted a lawyer, and the lawyer said there are too many things involved in this case, and because it is under investigation now, it is better to wait to see the authorities' decision," said Yin. Private finance companies attract money by paying more than state-owned banks. The benchmark interest rate of 1.5 percent on a one-year deposit is less than inflation. The Internet has helped draw in deposits from working class or rural depositors, many of them financial novices who have little knowledge of the risks involved.

South Koreans call fresh protests of president

KIM TONG-HYUNG
Associated Press
SEOUL, South Korea (AP)

— Hundreds of South Koreans called for new protests of conservative President Park Geun-hye, whose increasingly harsh treatment of union members and dissidents has led to criticism comparing her with her late dictator father.

The rally Saturday will be the latest in a series of mass protests in recent months, although police believe the turnout will be smaller than huge demonstrations earlier this month and on Nov. 14, when dozens were injured in a clash between

police and protesters.

Although Park still has a strong base of supporters, dissatisfaction has been growing. Demonstrators criticize her conservative policies in labor, trade and education and also what they see as her attacks on personal and political freedoms.

There is also widespread frustration among young people over joblessness and inequality, which has inspired an Internet buzzword, "Hell Joseon," referring to the feudal Joseon kingdom that ruled Korea before it was colonized by Japan in the early 20th

century.

Government figures show that the unemployment rate for people under 30 is approaching levels not seen since the late 1990s, when millions lost their jobs during a crippling financial crisis. The demonstrations have grown because protesters believe their causes have been neglected by politicians and the media, said Chung Jaewon, a social science professor at Seoul's Kookmin University. Park's government has responded by clamping down on the labor and civic organizations involved in organizing the protests.



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Mother Teresa to be made a saint after pope OKs miracle



In this 1993 photo, Mother Teresa, head of Missionaries of Charity, is photographed, in New Delhi, India. Pope Francis has signed off on the miracle needed to make Mother Teresa a saint, giving the nun who cared for the poorest of the poor one of the Catholic Church's highest honors just two decades after her death. The Vatican said Friday, Dec. 18, 2015, that Francis approved a decree attributing a miracle to Mother Teresa's intercession during an audience with the head of the Vatican's saint-making office on Thursday, his 79th birthday.

(AP Photo)

NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Mother Teresa, the tiny, stooped nun who cared for the poorest of the poor in the slums of India and beyond, will be declared a saint next year after Pope Francis approved a miracle attributed to her intercession.

The Vatican on Friday set no date for the canonization, but it is widely believed that it will take place in the first week of September to coincide with the 19th anniversary of Mother Teresa's death and during Francis' Holy Year of Mercy.

"With her work, she was always the symbol of mercy, not just with words but with her actions," said the superior general of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, the Rev. Sebastian Vazhakala.

The Vatican said Francis approved a decree attributing a miracle to Mother Teresa's intercession during an audience with the head of the Vatican's saint-making office on Thursday, his 79th birthday.

The miracle in question concerned the inexplicable cure of a Brazilian man suffering from a viral brain infection that resulted in multiple abscesses. By Dec. 9, 2008, he was in a coma and dying, suffering from an accumulation of fluid around the brain.

The Rev. Brian Kolodiejchuk, the postulator spearheading Mother Teresa's canonization case, said in a statement Friday that 30 minutes after the man was due to undergo surgery, he sat up, awake and without pain. The surgery did not take place and a day later the man was declared to be symptom-free.

The Vatican later attributed the cure to the fervent prayers to Mother Teresa's intercession by the man's wife, who at the time of his scheduled surgery was at her parish church praying alongside her pastor.

"This is fantastic news. We are very happy," said Sunita Kumar, a spokeswoman for the Missionaries of Charity in the eastern city of Kolkata (earlier called Calcutta), where Mother Teresa

lived and worked.

Born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu on Aug. 26, 1910, in Skopje, Macedonia, Mother Teresa joined the Loreto order of nuns in 1928. In 1946, while traveling by train from Calcutta to Darjeeling, she was inspired to found the Missionaries of Charity order. The order was established four years later and has since opened more than 130 houses worldwide to provide comfort and care for the needy, sick and "poorest of the poor." Mother Teresa won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 for her work with Calcutta's destitute and ill — work which continued even after she herself became sick. "The poor give us much more than we give them," Mother Teresa said in 1977. "They're such strong people,

living day to day with no food. At the time, her Missionaries of Charity order had nearly 4,000 nuns and ran roughly 600 orphanages, soup kitchens, homeless shelters and clinics around the world.

While Mother Teresa is known and admired by many around the world, she was not beloved by all. She was criticized for the quality of care in her clinics and for taking donations from Haitian dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier and disgraced American financier Charles Keating.

Detractors also opposed her stance against the use of birth control in Calcutta's slums, which was nevertheless in keeping with church teaching opposing artificial birth control.

Francis, whose papacy has

been dedicated to ministering to the poor just as Mother Teresa did, was an admirer. During his September 2014 visit to Albania, Francis confided to his interpreter that he was not only impressed by her fortitude, but in some ways feared it. Francis recounted that he had met Mother Teresa, an ethnic Albanian, when they attended a 1994 bishop synod at the Vatican together. At the time, he was Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio. "Bergoglio had Mother Teresa behind him, nearby, and he heard her intervene often with great strength, without letting herself in any way be intimidated by this assembly of bishops," the Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, later recounted. □

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Rwandans vote to decide on Kagame's term limits



President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame posts his ballot, in Kigali, Friday, Dec. 18, 2015. Rwandans are voting in a referendum to decide if President Paul Kagame should be allowed to extend his time in power. Kagame, 58, is ineligible to run in 2017 because the Rwandan constitution limits a president to two terms.

(AP Photo)

The Associated Press KIGALI, Rwanda (AP) — Rwandans voted Friday in a referendum to decide if President Paul Kagame should be allowed to extend his time in power, a vote he will win, according to pollsters. Kagame, 58, is ineligible to run in 2017 because the Rwandan constitution limits a president to two terms. But if Rwandans approve the referendum, Kagame would be able to run for an additional seven-year term and then two-five

year terms, which means he could possibly stay in power until 2034. Kagame became president in 2000 after being Rwanda's de facto leader since the end of the country's genocide in 1994. He is credited with stabilizing the country and promoting economic growth after the mass killings, but critics say he is an authoritarian ruler who does not tolerate opposition and he is accused of human rights abuses. Rwanda's political opposition criticizes the refer-

endum as undemocratic and the U.S., a key Rwandan ally, has opposed Kagame's bid to stay in power. The Chairman of the National Electoral Commission Mbanda Kalisa said partial results will be released later Friday. Many of the 6.4 million registered voters are expected to participate in the referendum. Kagame voted at Rugunga polling station in the capital, Kigali, accompanied by his wife and daughter. "What is happening is

people's choice. Ask people why they want it," he said maintaining that it's the wish of the Rwandan people that he extends his term. He said he would announce his candidature "any time."

Ninety-two per cent of Rwandans want President Paul Kagame for third term, according to a survey conducted by Ipsos, a global research firm, that was released this week.

"President Kagame is a hero and statesman like former Tanzania President Julius Nyerere," says Dan Gatera, a voter in Nyamata, east of the country. "The constitution should not be used to limit presidents who have talents."

Western diplomats voiced concerns about the vote. The European Union is worried that the opposition was not given adequate time to campaign against the referendum, said Michael Ryan, head of the EU delegation to Rwanda.

"There should have been adequate time for debates, and educating people about the changes made in the constitution," Ryan told journalists.

The Democratic Green Party of Rwanda is the only opposition party which rallied Rwandans to vote against changing the constitution to extend presidential term limits.

LATIN BRIEFS

Sticker shock in Argentina after its devaluation

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Many Argentines are expressing shock at a sharp rises in prices due to a major devaluation of the South American nation's currency. Supermarket shoppers interviewed Friday say they'll have to buy less of some products like bread and even cut out some things like beef. Gisela Guana says the rise is "scary." The 26-year-old maid says that earlier this week she could buy bread for 13 Argentine pesos (US\$0.92) per kilogram (42 cents a pound). Now it's 17 pesos (US\$1.21) (55 cents a pound). The administration of new President Mauricio Macri on Thursday lifted restrictions on buying U.S. dollars. That triggered an immediate devaluation of about 30 percent vis a vis the dollar.

Cuban migrants a topic at Central American meet

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — Costa Rica plans to raise the problem of 5,000 Cuban migrants stranded within its borders when Central America's leaders meet in El Salvador. El Salvador's foreign minister Hugo Martinez says the Central American Integration System could take up the topic at its meeting Friday. Trade is supposed to be the focus, but he says perhaps the region's leaders can find a solution that allows the Cubans to continue on their journey north.

Haiti group rejects president's electoral commission

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — A major Haitian opposition alliance is rejecting the government's efforts to calm protests that have cast a shadow over the Dec. 27 presidential runoff vote. The "Group of Eight" that

includes runoff contender Jude Celestin says the president's plan for a commission to evaluate the widely criticized election process is meant as merely a "cosmetic solution." The group has demanded an independent review

of October elections they assert were rigged in the government-backed candidate's favor. The group complains that President Michel Martelly didn't seek consensus with senators and opposition leaders before choosing

the commission's five members. Martelly announced the panel on Thursday. The opposition is demanding resignations at Haiti's electoral council. It's also encouraging protesters to "remain mobilized" until the impasse is resolved.



Rick, Jorn and Greisy Win MooMba's Balashi Chill contest



MOOMBA BEACH - Rick Neyzen, Jorn van der Heijde and Greisy Martinez are the winners of the Balashi Chill contest, which was held from October 1 to November 30 at MooMba Beach.

The contest decided who was the best-selling bartender or waiter/waitress at the fantastic restaurant and bar. For the winners there were great prizes, such as a weekend stay at the Renaissance Resort, which went to the winner Rick Neyzen, a dinner for two for runner-up Jorn van der Heijde and a spa coupon for waitress Greisy Martinez.

Everyone was really happy with the outcome and MooMba wishes to congratulate bartenders Rick and Jorn and waitress Greisy with their great result. Pabien! □



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particular by Hadicurari Restaurant. Volunteers Celeste Martien, Tanya Kirchner, Tatiana Pena, Janice St. Jago, Gabriela Sjiem-Fat, Rose-Ann de Windt and Gionette van Geest were fantastic, serving the three-course event with great style. Hadicurari's chef Ronald van Hasenbroek made sure

that everyone had their fill of the sumptuous courses. What a great initiative! Merry Christmas to all and a very Happy New Year!





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Ulrich Rutsch and Mrs. Cordula Inge Wittek from Germany. Ulrich and Cordula love Aruba very much, because of the great extremely friendly people,

the climate, beaches, restaurants and the relaxing atmosphere and people who work at the Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort. The certificate was presented by

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many Blue Parrotfish. Power Snorkel Guided Tours are organized daily (except Sundays) in the morning and afternoon so make sure to sign up the moment you book your entrance or after arrival on De Palm Island. Power Snorkel can be



booked as an additional activity to De Palm Island, Aruba's only all-inclusive destination at an affordable all-inclusive price. Whether you are a family looking for a day of fun and adventure together or a couple seeking to escape the hustle and bustle of the busy beach area for some relaxation and pampering, this island offers something for everyone! Just bring your towel, swimwear and

camera and enjoy. A day at De Palm Island includes alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, breakfast and lunch buffet, beaches and beach chairs, palapas, unlimited banana boat rides, a waterpark, snorkeling and much more. For more details about Power Snorkel visit De Palm Tours Concierge and Activity Desk in your hotel or www.depalmstours.com. T.: (+297) 522-4500. □



Juli Inkster Returns as Solheim Cup Team Captain

Page 20



Pittsburgh Steelers running back DeAngelo Williams (34) runs for a touchdown in the second half of an NFL football game against the Cincinnati Bengals, Sunday, Dec. 13, 2015, in Cincinnati.

(AP Photo/Frank Victores)

BARRY WILNER

AP Pro Football Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — If anyone can halt the Pittsburgh Steelers' offensive rampage, it might be the Denver Broncos defense.

In the only game of Week 15 matching teams with winning records, the NFL's most potent offense in recent weeks (Steelers) faces a defense that has been the league's stingiest (Broncos) at Heinz Field on Sunday.

The Broncos are allowing a league-low 4.3 yards per play, while the Steelers are

averaging an NFL-best 6.4 yards per play.

The Broncos' 44 sacks lead the league. Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger is averaging 332 yards passing, tops in the NFL.

Add in that Denver hasn't lost in Pittsburgh since 1997, and that the Steelers have won nine straight games in December.

Or that the Broncos, even with Peyton Manning still sidelined — but somewhat closer to returning while Brock Osweiler gets his fifth career start — can clinch a playoff berth with a vic-

tory, and the AFC West division with a win and a Kansas City loss at Baltimore. Meanwhile, the Steelers are in a tight race for an AFC wildcard and still have an outside chance of catching Cincinnati in the AFC North. "It's playoff football right now. We have to handle business," says Broncos receiver Emmanuel Sanders, who began his career in Pittsburgh. "Obviously, we dropped an egg versus Oakland (15-12 loss last week) and we had an opportunity to be first place in the AFC. So what can we

do about it? We can't do anything. We can't carry that luggage. We can only move forward. It's on to Pittsburgh." The unbeaten Carolina Panthers could secure home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs with a win over the New York Giants, and an Arizona Cardinals loss. But Carolina will be without in-form running back Jonathan Stewart.

Carolina leads the NFL with 21 interceptions and 33 takeaways. Safety Kurt Coleman has interceptions in each of his last five

games.

The Giants are in a three-way tie atop the mediocre NFC East, but face a tougher schedule than does either Washington or Philadelphia.

Key matchup: Giants receiver Odell Beckham Jr., against Panthers cornerback Josh Norman.

Arizona takes the NFC West with a win at Philadelphia or a Seattle loss, and can get a first-round bye with a victory and a Green Bay defeat.

Continued on page 18



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Austin, Gurley lead Rams past Buccaneers, 31-23

R.B. FALLSTROM
AP Sports Writer

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Tavon Austin scored twice and Todd Gurley topped 1,000 yards rushing as the Rams beat the Tampa Bay Buccaneers 31-23 on Thursday in what could be the club's final game in St. Louis. The 31st-ranked offense had an inspired effort in front of another half-filled but spirited Edward Jones Dome crowd, rolling to a 21-3 halftime lead behind Case Keenum's two touchdown passes. Fans chanted "Keep Our Rams! Keep Our Rams!" and carried signs, one of them reading "We Don't Need Kroenke, We Just Want our Rams." Owner Stan Kroenke, who wants to move the Rams

(6-8) to Los Angeles, attended the finale but kept a low profile. The team announced 51,295 tickets had been distributed for the 66,000-capacity dome. Up 31-13, the Rams became conservative and Jameis Winston took advantage with two touchdown passes in a big fourth quarter. He had just 125 yards passing the first three quarters, but finished with a career-best 363, his first 300-yard effort, for Tampa Bay (6-8). The halftime deficit was the Buccaneers' largest since they were down 35-7 against the Titans in their opening 42-14 loss. Mike Evans had nine receptions for 157 yards and topped 1,000 yards.



St. Louis Rams running back Benny Cunningham (36) returns a kickoff 102 yards during the fourth quarter of an NFL football game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015, in St. Louis. (AP Photo/L.G. Patterson)

Austin Seferian-Jenkins' 9-yard scoring catch cut the deficit to eight with

1:34 to play, but the Rams' Bryce Hager recovered the onside kick. Benny Cunningham had a 102-yard kickoff return to the Tampa Bay 3 in the fourth quarter and a 44-yard return on the opening kickoff capped by Austin's 17-yard scoring reception. Gurley needed 25 yards to become the first Rams rookie to rush for 1,000 yards since Jerome Bettis and didn't get it by much,

gaining 48 yards on 21 carries. Austin is the first player since Gale Sayers in 1965 to score at least four rushing touchdowns, five receiving touchdowns and one touchdown on a punt return in a season. He leads the Rams with 10 total TDs. Kenny Britt's 60-yard catch was the first by a Rams wide receiver since Stedman Bailey against Arizona in Week 4. □

Week 15 Preview

Continued from page 17

The key matchup here could be Cardinals star receiver Larry Fitzgerald against a team that never slows him down. He has 47 catches for 802 yards and 11 touchdowns in seven games vs. Philadelphia. The New York Jets probably need to win their remaining three games, including at the Dallas Cowboys in the only game on Saturday, to grab an AFC playoff wildcard.

They have won three straight with a solid defense and surprisingly strong of-

fense led by Ryan Fitzpatrick throwing to Brandon Marshall and Eric Decker, and Chris Ivory's tackle-breaking runs. But the Jets haven't won four in a row since 2010. The action began on Thursday with the St. Louis Rams beating the Tampa Bay Buccaneers 31-23 in what could be the franchise's final game in St. Louis. Fans chanted "Keep Our Rams! Keep Our Rams!" and carried signs, one of them reading "We Don't Need Kroenke, We Just Want our Rams." Owner Stan Kroenke wants to move the team back to Los Angeles. □

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Broncos QB Peyton Manning too sore to practice Friday



Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning, right, watches warm ups with Denver Broncos head coach Gary Kubiak prior to an NFL football game against the Oakland Raiders, Sunday, Dec. 13, 2015, in Denver.

(AP Photo/Jack Dempsey)

ARNIE STAPLETON
Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) -- Peyton Manning's left foot was sore Friday so he didn't practice after running the Denver Broncos' scout team for two days. Manning's foot has bothered him for months and he's been sidelined since mid-November with a torn plantar fascia that required a cast or boot for 10 days. He returned to practice Wednesday but after two days of running the scout team, he reported to work saying he was sore. "So we said, OK, we'll stop for the weekend and go from there," coach Gary Kubiak said. Kubiak had already ruled out the league's only five-time MVP for Sunday's game at Pittsburgh (8-5), when Brock Osweiler will

make his fifth consecutive start for Denver (10-3). The Broncos practiced outside on damp fields Friday after spending two days inside because of a heavy snowstorm and frigid temperatures, but Kubiak said "that had nothing to do with" holding Manning out. Manning was walking around after practice without any limp and Kubiak said Manning would make the trip "and be a part of everything we're doing and he'll be on the sidelines, I'd assume. Sidelines or press box, one or the other, but I'd assume it would be sidelines." This will be the first trip Manning has made since being sidelined. He missed trips to Chicago and San Diego and watched the Patriots-Broncos game from inside the locker room before

watching Denver's 15-12 loss to Oakland last week-end from the sideline. Manning's father, Archie, said in a television interview this week that his son's left foot was bothering him since before the season even started. On Dec. 2, Manning told a few news outlets, including The Associated Press, in an interview at his locker that he'd been ailing for some time but he declined to say exactly when his foot began bothering him. "I know that his foot has been sore since we left Indianapolis" on Nov. 8, Kubiak said. "So, it's something that we've been dealing with and trying to deal with it the right way to get him back to where he feels really good. The progress has been very good. That's all I know."

In addition to Manning, Kubiak said safeties T.J. Ward (ankle) and Omar Bolden (hamstring) and linebacker Larentee McCray (hamstring) would miss Sunday's game. Also, safety Darian Stewart (hamstring) was 50-50 after missing practice all week. He's one of a half-dozen players listed as questionable. For the second straight week, the Broncos had 22

players listed on their injury report. "Half the damn team," Kubiak said. He said he expects Ward to return to practice Wednesday. But Bolden had a setback in his return. "We thought he would be ready to go," Kubiak said. "He practiced on Wednesday. He came out on Thursday, went about five minutes and said it was bothering him, so we shut him down." □

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Juli Inkster returns as Solheim Cup team captain

DOUG FERGUSON

AP Golf Writer

Juli Inkster said being the U.S. Solheim Cup captain was one of the biggest thrills of her career.

And now she gets to do it again.

Inkster was introduced as captain Friday during a surprise announcement at Des Moines Country Club, the Iowa course that will host the 2017 matches. She is the fourth American to be captain a second time, and she will try to join Judy Rankin as the only captain of two winning teams.

It wasn't a difficult decision.

"The committee ... got together right after the Solheim Cup and decided which way to go," Inkster said in a conference call. "They asked me to do it again, and I jumped at the opportunity."

The Americans staged an



Juli Inkster hits out of a bunker of the Lake Merced Golf Club in Daly City, Calif. Juli Inkster said being the U.S. Solheim Cup captain was one of the biggest thrills of her career. Inkster was introduced as captain Friday, Dec. 18, 2015 during a surprise announcement at Des Moines Country Club, the Iowa course that will host the 2017 matches. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

improbable rally in Germany to beat Europe this year after a heated debate over Alison Lee picking up her short putt after assuming Suzann Pettersen had conceded it. Pettersen was on the far end of the green. The Ameri-

cans, furious at what they considered a breach of sportsmanship, won 8 1/2 out of 12 points in singles to reclaim the cup.

Inkster said winning was sweet, though it didn't define her experience.

"Even if we had lost, I would

have done it again," she said. "It was so much fun. It was an amazing experience for me. I grew as a person doing it, and some of the leadership skills I didn't think I had, I found out that I could."

"We won, and things

turned out well."

Inkster, who captured the career Grand Slam during her Hall of Fame career, played nine times in the Solheim Cup, once as a playing assistant captain.

"I've had a lot of exciting and memorable highlights during my time on tour, but leading that team of 12 women was one of the biggest thrills of my entire career," Inkster said. "So the answer was easy."

The hard part was keeping quiet.

Inkster said she had been sitting on the news for more than a month, and she said it was uncomfortable "telling people, 'I don't know' when I already knew."

That's why the LPGA Tour decided to announce the next captain so far in advance of the August 2017 matches, and on a Friday afternoon a week before Christmas. □

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LeBron James plows into crowd, wife of golfer Jason Day hurt

TOM WITHERS

AP Sports Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — The wife of PGA champion Jason Day is suffering from concussion symptoms after NBA star LeBron James crashed into her during a Cavaliers game.

Day's agent, Bud Martin, issued a statement Friday morning saying Ellie Day "is resting comfortably and appreciates all of those who have reached out and are concerned about her." He added she has "no hard feelings" toward James and quotes her as saying, "He was just doing his job. Go Cavs."

Ellie Day was carried from Quicken Loans Arena on a backboard, placed on a stretcher with her head immobilized and taken to MetroHealth Medical Center on Thursday night. She was released early Friday morning.

James was scrambling for a loose ball in the fourth quarter of a 104-100 win over Oklahoma City when the 6-foot-8, 250-pound All-Star launched himself into the air, plowing into Day as she sat next to her husband.

"First of all, I am OK!!" Ellie Day tweeted Friday. "I am incredibly sore and

exhausted. Being tackled by that large man would compare to a minor car accident. My head and neck hit pretty hard so I was really scary. My whole body feels like it was hit by a truck.

"Second, it was so fast. I didn't remember until 2 a.m. seeing the ball come toward me. It was a blur. To the crazies that think Jason should have protected me — if he had had time to react, so would have I. Also, I would not have liked both dudes landing on me. LeBron is huge and had such momentum he could not have stopped!!

In the statement, she thanked her doctors, emergency medical staff and the entire Cleveland Cavaliers organization for their help.

James said he spoke with Ellie Day while she was being helped by medical personnel during a stoppage in play.

"I squeezed her hand and she said she was OK," he said. "She was just a little weary."

Before he was given more information on her, James, who scored 33 points and flirted with a triple-double, was noticeably shaken when he left the floor fol-



Cleveland Cavaliers' LeBron James falls into Ellie Day, wife of PGA Tour golf player Jason Day, at left, during the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Oklahoma City Thunder, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015, in Cleveland.

(John Kuntz/The Plain Dealer via AP)

lowing the Cavs' win. "For me, obviously, her health is very important and hopefully she is doing well," James said. "The guys told me she's doing great now. For me, just going for a loose ball, tried to keep the possession going, I just hate that that was the end result." James said if she had been

pregnant, he would have jumped over the first row of seats.

A little while later, James tweeted: "Ellie Day I hope you're doing okay! My apologies! Hope u guys come back to another game soon. Love LJ!"

On Nov. 11, Ellie Day gave birth to the couple's second child, a girl named

Lucy.

Jason Day, who lives in a Columbus suburb, accompanied his wife as she was carried from the floor. The couple has attended Cleveland games in the past, and she was pregnant with their second child when they went to an exhibition game earlier this year in Columbus. □

Mariners re-sign RHP Iwakuma after reported with Dodgers

TIM BOOTH

AP Sports Writer

SEATTLE (AP) — The Seattle Mariners didn't wait long to go after Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma after his agreement with the Los Angeles Dodgers was never finalized.

The Mariners re-signed Iwakuma late Thursday night, locking up the right-hander for 2016 with options for the 2017 and 2018 seasons — financial terms were not announced. The team posted a video on Twitter of general manager Jerry Dipoto announcing the signing at the club's holiday party.

Finding a way to re-sign Iwakuma was a priority for Seattle entering the offseason. But reports surfaced earlier this month that Iwa-

kuma and the Dodgers had agreed to a contract, leading the Mariners to trade for left-handed starter Wade Miley from Boston. But Iwakuma's deal with the Dodgers was never finalized and the 34-year-old was suddenly available again.

"We said from the start that Kuma was a priority for us," Dipoto said in a statement. "Obviously, the developments from the last few days allowed us to get back in the game. It's a credit to our ownership; to Howard Lincoln, to Kevin Mather, to our entire ownership group that we were able to get aggressive and find a way to bring Kuma back to the Mariners. We're all thrilled. □

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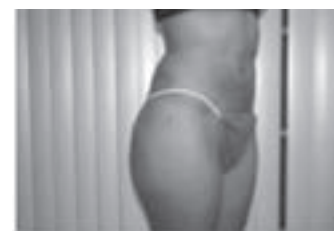
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Clemson QB Deshaun Watson voted ACC offensive player of year



Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson throws a pass during the first half of an NCAA college football game against Florida State in Clemson, S.C. Watson, a Heisman Trophy finalist, was honored as the ACC's offensive player of the year this week by The Associated Press.

(AP Photo/Richard Shiro)

JOEDY McCREARY
Associated Press

No. 1 Clemson swept through the Atlantic Coast Conference this season and that helped three Tigers claim league-wide individual awards. Heisman Trophy finalist Deshaun Watson was honored as the ACC's offensive player of the year this

week by The Associated Press while lineman - and fellow AP All-America selection - Shaq Lawson was picked as the defensive player of the year and Dabo Swinney was selected as the coach of the year.

"I enjoy it, but I enjoy it for our team because that's just a team award," Swin-

ney said. "I haven't caught a ball. I haven't made a tackle. (Coaches) of the years are really made by the players. That's just the way it is. It's an honor and it's great to be recognized, but it's truly a reflection of the team and the staff." A pair of Pittsburgh players - running back Qadree Ollison and safety Jordan

Whitehead - share the award for top newcomer. Watson received 11 votes for the offensive award from a panel of 14 reporters, one for every school in the league. The other three votes went to Florida State running back Dalvin Cook. In defensive voting, Lawson had seven votes to six for Duke safety Jeremy Cash. Swinney received 10 votes for the coaching award and four went to North Carolina's Larry Fedora.

Ollison and Whitehead each had five votes for the award for newcomers while Clemson's Mitch Hyatt received two votes. Six players were unanimous selections to the inaugural AP All-ACC first team: Watson, Cook, Lawson and Cash plus Pitt receiver Tyler Boyd and North Carolina guard Landon Turner.

Watson and Lawson were joined on the first team by teammates Eric Mac Lain at guard and Mackensie Alexander at cornerback. Nine more made the second team following Clemson's best season since 1981, when the Tigers claimed their only national

title.

Clemson (13-0) will play Oklahoma in the Orange Bowl semifinal on New Year's Eve.

In winning the Davey O'Brien Award as the top quarterback in college football, Watson led the ACC with 3,512 yards passing and added 887 yards rushing - good for seventh-most among all ACC rushers. He's the only player in the nation with more than 3,500 yards passing and 850 yards rushing.

Clemson finished with the ACC's most productive offense, averaging 510.6 total yards, and ranked second in total defense, giving up 295.7 yards per game. The Tigers rank in the top four in each of the eight major statistical categories.

"The game is about performance so if I win or lose some awards, I've pretty much got to still go out there and do my job," Watson said. "You celebrate and enjoy it and appreciate all the hard work and support of your teammates and coaches around you. You make sure you don't take it for granted." □

Duke tunes out distractions, focuses on Pinstripe Bowl

JOEDY McCREARY
Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. (AP) - Duke is tuning out some distractions ahead of its Pinstripe Bowl matchup with Indiana. The Blue Devils (7-5) will need to find a new offensive coordinator soon and their team MVP will miss the bowl game with an injury. Despite that, coach David Cutcliffe said his team's focus hasn't wavered heading into the Dec. 26 game against the Hoosiers (6-6) at Yankee Stadium. "The challenge for us is to play our best game - that's what you should do in your last game, that's what you should do in a bowl game," Cutcliffe said this week. "It's about the preparation right now and we've been very focused and very pleased with what we've gotten accomplished to this point."



Duke quarterback Thomas Sirk (1) looks to pass against North Carolina during the first half of an NCAA college football game in Chapel Hill, N.C., Saturday, Nov. 7, 2015.

(AP Photo/Gerry Broome)

It's been a busy week off the field at Duke: Offensive coordinator Scottie Montgomery was hired Sunday to coach East Carolina, but will call plays in the bowl game before taking over the Pirates' program. Three days later, the team announced that senior Jer-

emy Cash - an All-America safety who was voted the team's MVP - will miss the bowl game after having right wrist surgery. Cutcliffe said Cash was injured in Duke's next-to-last game at Virginia, was bothered during practice before the finale at Wake

Forest and worsened during the second half of that game. Cutcliffe said team doctors told him an MRI revealed that "this needed to be done, and it needed to be done immediately."

"It's really frustrating to him, but I get it," the coach added. "The health of the player is always first."

Cutcliffe said he won't start searching in earnest for a new offensive coordinator until after the bowl game, saying he's received more than 100 emails and about 90 phone calls about replacing Montgomery.

"The process is always started because my brain does work," Cutcliffe said. "I don't have time for that and to do the job I should be doing for our squad. I am totally focused on the Pinstripe Bowl preparation. ... I have some thoughts, I have plans, but I'm not

working on them."

Having a coordinator take a new job - but stick around for the bowl - isn't exactly new territory for the Blue Devils. Two years ago, then-OC Kurt Roper took the same job at Florida but called plays for Duke in the Chick-fil-A Bowl against Texas A&M.

"When Coach Roper (took the Florida job), we found that out and came back to practice, and it was business as usual," center Matt Skura said. "That's kind of the same thing it's been here. (Montgomery) hasn't mentally moved on. He's probably coaching us harder right now than he ever has, and we're taking it as business as usual. Everyone's locked in. 'Coach Mo' wants to win this game just as bad as all of us do, and we've been seeing that in practice." □

In Tech:

AI research center, Android Pay, OneDrive storage



Tesla Motors Inc. CEO Elon Musk speaks at a conference in Paris. PayPal ringleaders Musk, Thiel and Reid Hoffman are joining forces with several other technology luminaries and companies to contribute \$1 billion to finance a Silicon Valley research center that will dig deeper into the field of artificial intelligence, or "machine learning." The nonprofit company is called OpenAI.

(AP Photo/Francois Mori)

The Associated Press

Three billionaires who launched PayPal and then went on to even greater success in their next ventures are now trying to make sure that artificial intelligence does more good than harm to humans.

PayPal ringleaders Elon Musk, Peter Thiel and Reid Hoffman are joining forces with several other technology luminaries and com-

panies to contribute \$1 billion to finance a Silicon Valley research center that will dig deeper into the field of artificial intelligence, or "machine learning."

The nonprofit company, called OpenAI, will focus on improving "digital intelligence in the way that is most likely to benefit humanity as a whole."

Musk, who has amassed an

estimated fortune of \$13 billion, has been particularly outspoken about his fears that computers could work against humans if the efforts to develop artificial intelligence go awry. He made waves last year when he described artificial intelligence as a potential "demon" and our "biggest existential threat." OpenAI will be run by Ilya Sutskever, who spent the

past three years working for Google's "brain team" that focused on machine learning.

Although he first got rich as a PayPal co-founder, Musk has made far more money as CEO of electric car maker Tesla Motors and rocket ship maker Space X.

Thiel, PayPal's former CEO, is better known as one of Facebook's early investors and a critic of college education. His fortune is currently estimated at about \$3 billion.

Hoffman was one of PayPal's first employees and then went on to co-found professional networking service LinkedIn Corp., which accounts for most of his estimated fortune of about \$4 billion.

-Michael Liedtke, AP Technology Writer

Tap-and-pay services continue to expand gradually. Google said Tuesday that it will start offering Android Pay in Australia in the first half of next year. Google Inc. says it's working with leading financial institutions with the goal of making it available to MasterCard and Visa card holders. Apple Pay launched in Australia last month, but

only for American Express customers.

Android Pay is Google's answer to Apple Pay, which requires an Apple device. Both let you make purchases by tapping the phone next to a store's payment machine — as long as it's a newer machine with wireless capabilities known as NFC.

Samsung has its own payment service, Samsung Pay, on its main Android phones. It goes further than Android and Apple Pay in working with many machines that lack NFC. That's because it has a backup mechanism to replicate old-school card swipes.

On Tuesday, Samsung announced support for 19 additional banks, including PNC Bank and KeyBank.

Even as phone makers push their mobile-payment services, financial institutions and retailers such as Wal-Mart have been working on their own services.

-Anick Jesdanun, AP Technology Writer

After a backlash, Microsoft is reversing part of its plan to tighten free storage offered through its OneDrive online storage service. □

Microsoft opens NY studio to showcase HoloLens headset

NEW YORK (AP) — Microsoft is opening a studio in New York to showcase its upcoming HoloLens headset for inserting holograms into real-world settings.

At the studio, software developers will see a video and get hands-on demonstrations. One is a game in which you shoot hologram alien robots in front of you. Another shows the technology's potential in presentations and sales, using a luxury watch as an example of how holograms can give potential customers more insights into features. A third demo highlights HoloLens' graphical and editing capabilities.

The studio, announced Thursday, is located at Microsoft's flagship retail store on Fifth Avenue. It

won't be open to the general public, though. Rather, software developers who want to preview the next-generation technology will have to make an appointment at <https://www.microsoft.com/microsoft-hololens>.

The idea is to get developers to start thinking of the technology's potential. Microsoft had a traveling exhibit in 11 cities, and the company says all slots were booked within 90 minutes. The new studio in New York was designed as a long-term home for the demos.

Microsoft Corp. will start selling developers editions of the headset early next year for \$3,000. There's no release date for a consumer version yet. □



This photo provided by Microsoft shows the Microsoft HoloLens studio in New York. Microsoft is opening the studio to showcase its upcoming HoloLens headset for inserting holograms into real-world settings. At the studio, software developers will see a video and get hands-on demonstrations. (Microsoft via AP)

Wall Street tumbles on global economic uncertainty

MARLEY JAY
AP Markets Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks plunged across all sectors in the heaviest trading of the year Friday as enthusiasm over a long-awaited increase in U.S. interest rates faded. Several other negative factors com-

fell short of what investors were hoping for. Another drop in energy prices sent oil stocks lower again, and worries about weak global growth weighed on shipping and other transportation companies. The Dow Jones industrial average dropped 367.29

tuous week slightly lower. Stocks had rallied over the first three days and jumped Wednesday after the Federal Reserve raised interest rates for the first time in almost a decade. The move was a vote of confidence in the U.S. economy. But over the next two days

is what you get," he said. The global market went into a similar slide two weeks ago, when the European Central Bank ramped up its stimulus efforts but didn't do nearly as much as expected. Stocks rallied after ECB President Mario Draghi said the bank is ready to expand its stimulus program further if needed. Those slumps show that investors will continue keeping an eye on the words and deeds of central banks in struggling Europe and Japan as well as the U.S. for the foreseeable future. The Federal Reserve had kept interest rates near zero for seven years. Fed Chair Janet Yellen emphasized that despite the boost, interest rates will remain low for some time. That pleased investors overall, but it eventually put pressure on bank stocks. Banks will benefit from higher interest rates and have and have rallied over the last few months, but the initial benefits won't be great. Goldman Sachs dropped \$7.12, or 3.9 percent, to \$175.49 and ETrade Financial lost \$1.13, or 3.8 percent, to \$28.82. Citigroup gave up \$1.63, or 3.1 percent, to \$51.21. Tech stocks also slumped. Apple fell \$2.95, or 2.7 percent, to \$106.03. The stock has fallen 10 percent in December and has risen only three days this month. Microsoft fell \$1.57, or 2.8 percent, to \$54.13. Transportation stocks also fell. Shares of J.B. Hunt Transportation surrendered \$1.96, or 2.7 percent, to \$70.62 and Ryder System lost \$2.59, or 4.6 percent, to \$54.08.



Trader Timothy Nick works on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Stocks plunged across all sectors in the heaviest trading of the year Friday as enthusiasm over a long-awaited increase in U.S. interest rates faded.
(AP Photo/Richard Drew)

bined to give the market its second big loss in a row, bringing the indexes lower for the week. Bank stocks, which investors had bid up in hopes they would become more profitable as loan rates climbed, fell the most. Technology shares suffered more declines as a bad December got worse for Apple. The world's most valuable publicly traded company sank again, bringing its monthly loss to 10 percent. Overseas, Japan's market sank after that country's central bank made changes to a stimulus program that

points, or 2.1 percent, to 17,128.55. The S&P 500 index fell 36.34 points, or 1.8 percent, to 2,005.55. The Nasdaq composite sank 79.47 points, or 1.6 percent, to 4,923.08. All 10 Standard & Poor's 500 sectors fell. U.S. stock trading was even more volatile than usual Friday because of the simultaneous expiration of several kinds of futures and other contracts that investors use to place bets on indexes and individual stocks. As a result Friday was the busiest trading day of the year for stocks. The market ended a tumultuous

stocks were hit by some of the worries that have dogged them all year, like weakness in the Chinese economy, slowing global growth, and skidding prices for energy and metals. While the Bank of Japan plans to spend a bit more on exchange-traded funds for companies that increase hiring and investment, investors were hoping for more, according to Ryan Larson, head of U.S. equity trading for RBC Global Asset Management. "They were looking for more, and when the market's disappointed, this

LifeLock is paying \$100M to clients to settle charges

WASHINGTON (AP) — LifeLock is paying \$100 million to consumers to settle charges by federal regulators that it failed to take adequate measures to protect customers' personal data under a court order.

The Federal Trade Commission announced the settlement this week with the provider of identity-theft protection. The agency says it's the largest settlement it has won in this type of enforcement case.

The 2010 order by a federal court required LifeLock Inc. to secure customers' data, such as credit card and Social Security numbers, and to avoid false advertising claims. The order resulted from an action brought by the FTC and attorneys general in 35 states, alleging that LifeLock used false claims to promote its services. The company paid \$12 million in that settlement, which went mostly to customer refunds, and agreed to make changes to its business practices.

The FTC said that LifeLock violated the order by failing to maintain "a comprehensive information-security program" and to avoid deceptive advertising.

LifeLock is based in Tempe, Arizona. Company co-founder and CEO Todd Davis used to put his own Social Security number on business cards and company trucks to advertise LifeLock's services.

LifeLock noted Thursday that it neither confirms nor denies the government's allegations under terms of the new settlement. Once it is approved by the court, the settlement will help bring to a close the FTC case as well as a class-action lawsuit, the company said.

"The allegations raised by the FTC are related to advertisements that we no longer run and policies that are no longer in place," LifeLock said in a statement. "The settlement does not require us to change any of our current products or practices."

BlackBerry's results beat expectations, shares rise

WATERLOO, Ontario (AP) — BlackBerry reported quarterly results Friday that beat Wall Street expectations, even as revenue fell sharply. Shares of the smartphone maker jumped 15 percent in afternoon trading. CEO John Chen said BlackBerry's latest device, the Priv, has been "well received" since it went

on sale last month. More carriers are expected to offer the phone around the world in the next several quarters, he said. The smartphone is the company's first to run on the Android operating system. The Canadian company reported a loss of \$89 million, or 17 cents per share, in its fiscal third quarter, compared with a loss of

\$148 million, or 24 cents per share, in the same quarter a year ago. Losses, adjusted for non-recurring costs and amortization costs, came to 3 cents per share. But that was better than Wall Street expectations. The average estimate of 12 analysts surveyed by Zacks Investment Research was for a loss of 15 cents per share.

Revenue fell 31 percent from a year ago to \$548 million in the period, which also beat Street forecasts. Nine analysts surveyed by Zacks expected \$485.2 million. Shares of BlackBerry Ltd. rose \$1.17 to \$8.97 Friday afternoon. Its shares are still down about 18 percent since the beginning of the year.

Nigerian farmers cleared to sue Shell in Dutch court

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) —

Nigerian farmers will have the chance to sue oil multinational Shell in a Dutch court for pollution they blame on leaking pipelines, a Dutch appeals court ruled Friday.

Activists said the ruling sets a landmark legal precedent that clears the way for

Dutch-based companies to be sued for alleged negligence of their subsidiaries elsewhere in the world.

"There is now jurisprudence that means victims of human rights violations or pollution can sue Dutch multinationals in the Netherlands," said Geert Ritsema of the Dutch arm of Friends of the Earth, the environ-

mental group that is also involved in the case. The case centers on a charge from four farmers that Shell and its Nigerian unit are liable for damages caused by leaks from two underground oil pipes from 2004-2007. Shell has argued that it has no liability in the case and that Dutch courts did not have jurisdiction. "It

cannot be established in advance that the parent company is not liable for possible negligence of the Nigerian operating company," The Hague Appeals Court said in a statement.

In a written reaction, Shell's Nigerian subsidiary said it was disappointed in the ruling. "We believe allegations concerning Nigerian

plaintiffs in dispute with a Nigerian company, over issues which took place within Nigeria, should be heard in Nigeria," the statement said. Friday's decision means the case that centered on pollution in the land and in the water around Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta can proceed, likely next year. □

BOJ tweaks stimulus to encourage corporate spending, hiring

ELAINE KURTENBACH

AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — The Bank of Japan tweaked its lavish stimulus program Friday in a well-timed move that spotlights pressures on companies to do more to support growth by raising wages and investing in factories and equipment.

This week, the U.S. central bank raised its key interest rate by a quarter percentage point, signaling confidence in the U.S. recovery at a time when Japan is still struggling to re-ignite growth after years of stagnation.

The BOJ said Friday after a scheduled policy meeting that it will expand purchases of shares in exchange traded funds, for companies that increase hiring and investment, by 300 billion yen (\$2.4 billion) from the current 3 trillion yen (\$24 billion).

Coming so soon after the Fed's announcement, the BOJ's policy meeting drew more than the usual amount of speculation over whether more stimulus

was planned.

The news briefly pushed the Nikkei 225 stock index up about 500 points, or more than 2 percent, though it lost those gains to close down 1.9 percent. The dollar also jumped against the Japanese yen, to over 123 yen to the dollar, before falling back to 121.70, down from its previous close of 122.58.

The BOJ has been pumping tens of trillions of yen (trillions of dollars) a year into the economy by buying up government bonds and other assets. The overall scale of the program remains intact.

The central bank has yet to make much progress toward a 2 percent inflation target that might signal the recovery has taken hold.

The BOJ's policy tinkering sends a message to companies. It also is meant to show the central bank still has room to maneuver despite the near-zero interest rates, Masaaki Kanno of JPMorgan said in a research note.

"We believe that today's



A man walks past Nikkei stock index displayed on an electronic board at a securities firm in Tokyo. The Bank of Japan tweaked its lavish stimulus program Friday in a well-timed move that spotlights pressures on companies to do more to support growth by raising wages and investing in factories and equipment.

(AP Photo/Shuji Kajiyama)

fine tuning of the monetary policy is an answer from the BOJ that there still exists the tools of additional easing," he said.

Thanks to the unprecedented barrage of "quantitative easing" by the BOJ, corporate profits have ballooned to record lev-

els. A weak Japanese yen swells the value of companies' overseas profits when brought back to Japan.

Those cash piles exceed 300 trillion yen (\$2.44 trillion), or about 60 percent of Japan's GDP.

With the success of his "Abenomics" stimulus strat-

egies at stake, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has stepped up pressure on corporations to spend more of that money on raising wages and investing in factories and equipment.

Friday's move is meant to create fresh incentives to do so. □

Court rejects case against Australian cigarette logos ban

KRISTEN GELINEAU

Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — Tobacco giant Philip Morris has suffered another setback in its efforts to challenge an Australian law that bans tobacco companies from placing logos on their cigarette packs and forces them instead to feature graphic health warnings.

Hong Kong-based Philip Morris Asia Ltd., which had argued Australia's law constitutes a sweeping ban on

trademarks, said on Friday that the Permanent Court of Arbitration in Singapore determined that it had no jurisdiction to hear the tobacco company's case.

Philip Morris said it would review the court's decision, which brings to an end the tobacco giant's latest challenge to Australia's tough packaging restrictions.

Australia became the first country in the world to mandate plain cigarette packs with no brand logo

or colors permitted when the law went into effect in 2012. Cigarette packs are now uniformly brown and feature graphic warnings, including photos of cancer-riddled mouths and gangrenous toes. Tobacco companies fought the law, arguing it violated intellectual property rights and devalued their trademarks, but Australia's highest court upheld it.

"There is nothing in today's outcome that addresses,

let alone validates, plain packaging in Australia or anywhere else," Marc Firestone, Philip Morris International Senior Vice President and General Counsel, said in a statement.

"It is regrettable that the outcome hinged entirely on a procedural issue that Australia chose to advocate instead of confronting head on the merits of whether plain packaging is legal or even works."

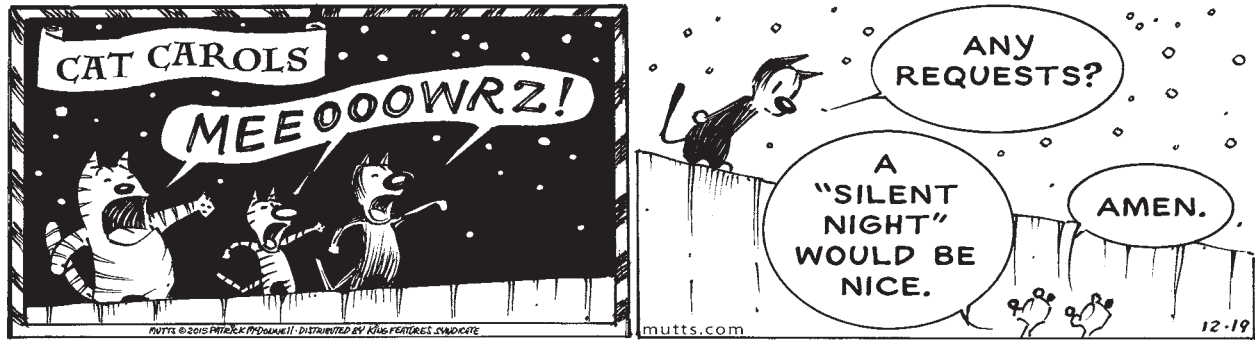
The Australian minister re-

sponsible for tobacco policy said plain packaging meets all of the country's international legal obligations.

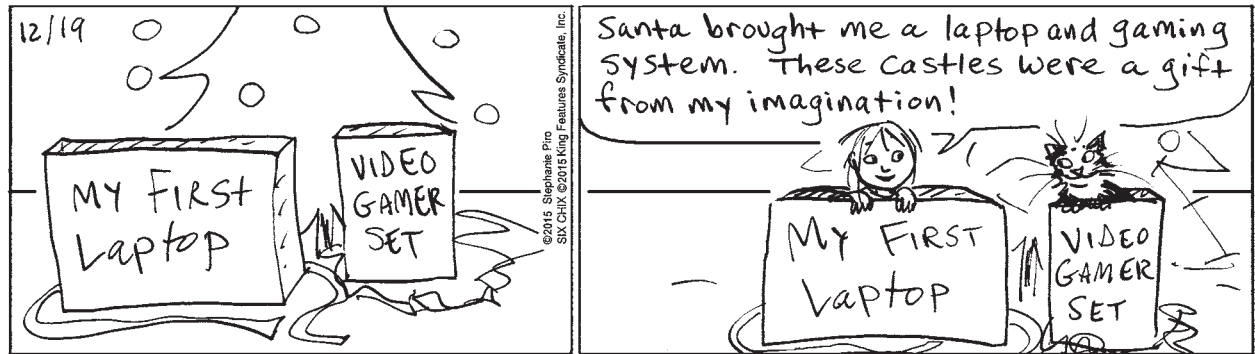
"Smoking does untold harm to Australians, causing deaths from cancer, lung and heart disease, and hurting families," Minister for Rural Health Fiona Nash said in a statement.

The Public Health Association of Australia dubbed the arbitration court's decision a major victory. □

Mutts



6 Chix



Blondie



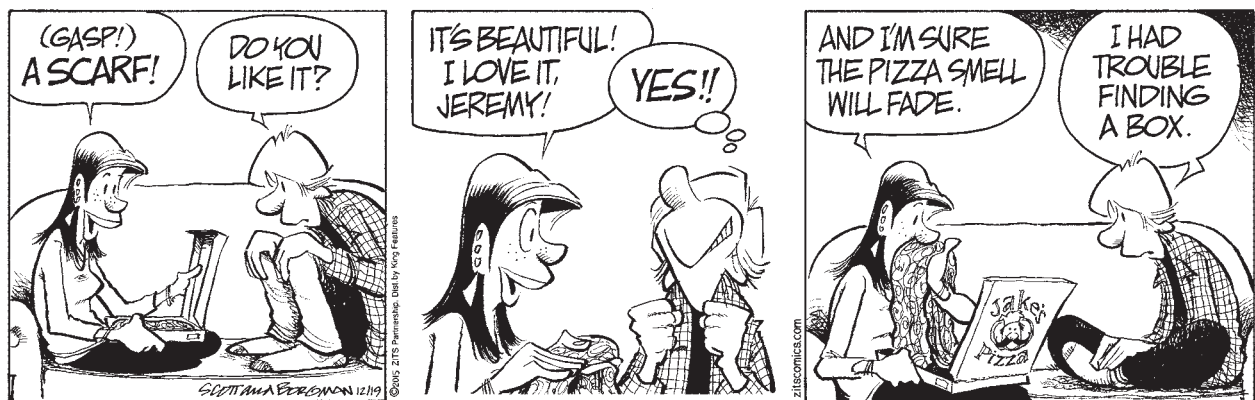
Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

		6		2		3		
	1		9				4	
				1				
			2		1		5	
1		2				8		7
	3		8		4			
				9				
	8				3		1	
		5		6		2		

Difficulty Level
★★★★
12/19

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Yesterday's puzzle answer

9	6	5	7	8	1	3	2	4
4	3	1	2	6	5	8	7	9
7	2	8	4	9	3	6	1	5
5	7	6	9	1	2	4	8	3
8	4	2	3	7	6	5	9	1
1	9	3	5	4	8	7	6	2
3	5	7	8	2	9	1	4	6
6	8	9	1	3	4	2	5	7
2	1	4	6	5	7	9	3	8

- ACROSS
- Wily scheme
 - Acting award
 - Night __; those staying up late
 - Make sharper
 - Use a loom
 - Ring out
 - Speck
 - Neighbor of India
 - Walk the floor
 - Building levels
 - Toiled
 - Silent assent
 - Emulates Ali
 - French farewell
 - Is able to
 - Go away
 - __ in the "Clowns"
 - Actor Linden
 - Not readily visible
 - Sombrero
 - Fall back into an addiction
 - Small digit
 - Nighttime news hour, often
 - __ by the hair of my chinny chin chin"
 - Instrument for Ringo
 - Thin piece of leather
 - A's followers
 - Sweetheart
 - Embankment
 - Chum
 - Quite a bit alike
 - Sickness
 - Highest cards
 - Trap
 - Wingless insect
 - Powerful wind
 - Sea duck with soft down
 - __-friendly; easy to operate
 - Colony bugs
 - Big rigs
 - Cuts off

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14					15						16			
17					18						19			
20				21			22			23				
			24				25							
26	27	28			29				30	31	32	33		
34					35				36					
37				38				39			40			
41			42				43				44			
45						46				47				
			48	49				50						
51	52	53					54				55	56	57	
58					59	60				61				
62					63					64				
65					66					67				

Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews
12/19/15

Friday's Puzzle Solved

3	Hold __; clutch	38	Fight off	51	Long story
4	Longed	39	Okra, for one	52	"__ See Clearly Now"
5	Possessed	42	Suitcases	53	Dissolve
6	Observes	44	Very sad	54	Eins und zwei
7	Maximum limit	46	Kopell or Mac	55	Additionally
8	Singer Frankie	47	"Who __ seen the wind?..."	56	Ooze out
9	Take it easy	49	Flower holders	57	All __; listening
10	__ to; against	50	TV's Morgan	60	High nav. rank
11	__ the pants in the family; rule the roost				
12	Mantilla fabric				
13	Snow toy				
21	Debtor's note				
23	Misrepresent				
25	Equilibrium				
26	Blaze residue				
27	Passed out cards				
28	Prefix for act or view				
29	Coolidge, to friends				
31	Decorate				
32	Trial setting				
33	Adversary				
35	Egg producer				
36	Truman's monogram				

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Man charged with defrauding over 100 investors of \$14M

LARRY NEUMEISTER
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A man serving a decade in prison for a financial fraud began working on his next while behind bars, authorities said Friday as they unveiled fresh charges accusing him of duping at least 100 investors into trusting him with \$14 million.

Edward Durante, 63, of New York City, pleaded not guilty in Manhattan federal court after his extradition from Germany. He was held without bail. His attorney, Jennifer Willis, declined to comment.

Prosecutors said Durante funneled more than \$9 million of the \$14 million from investors to himself, his family and co-conspirators as he lied about how their money would be used. They said he recruited investors nationwide, including from California, the Midwest, New York and Boston.

Philip R. Bartlett, head of the New York office of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, called it "a classic case of greed overcoming honest business practices." Durante faces multiple

charges including conspiracy, securities fraud, wire fraud, money laundering and perjury. If convicted, he could face decades in prison. Prosecutors said he was convicted of similar charges in 2001, when he was also barred from selling securities in the future and was ordered to surrender more than \$39 million, which has remained unpaid.

The SEC said that while behind bars, he used a fictitious name, Anthony Walsh, to negotiate the acquisition of VGTel as a shell company before assigning the company's certificates to several entities he controlled to disguise that he controlled most of the company's stock.

After his 2009 prison release, Durante moved to New York City and used fictitious names including Ted Wise and Efran Eisenberg to peddle shares to unsuspecting investors, including a man in the New England area who bought \$1.2 million of worthless VGTel stock and then encouraged at least 30 friends and family members to invest as well, the SEC said. □

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Panda cub in Washington is thriving ahead of public debut

BEN NUCKOLS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — If the youngest giant panda cub at the National Zoo is stressed out about appearing in front of crowds for the first time, he isn't showing it.

Keepers were expecting Bei Bei to squawk and squirm during an audience with a small news media contingent earlier this week. Instead, under bright television lights with cameras clicking, he quickly fell asleep on an examination table, leaving a small puddle of drool on the tablecloth.

Panda biologist Laurie Thompson explained that before he went in front of the cameras, Bei Bei was playing with a piece of bamboo and trying to walk. Just like a newborn human, he tires easily.

"I'm very proud of him," Thompson said. "Obviously, he wasn't too bothered by all the people here. This is just the beginning for him as far as people go."

Bei Bei is ready for his close-up. The cub will make a few appearances before selected audienc-



In this photo taken Dec. 14, 2015, animal keeper Nicole MacCorkle holds Bei Bei, the National Zoo's newest panda and offspring of Mei Xiang and Tian Tian, for members of the media at the National Zoo in Washington. The youngest giant panda cub at the National Zoo is ready for his close-up. Bei Bei will make his public debut on Jan. 16. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

es ahead of his public debut on Jan. 16, when the panda house will reopen. That's also around the time Bei Bei will be sure enough on his feet that he'll get to venture into the outdoor panda habitat for the first time.

Pandas are famously helpless at birth: pink, hairless, blind, and about the size

of a stick of butter. Bei Bei, who was a twin — his brother did not survive — weighed just 4 ounces (113 grams) when he was born. Now, at nearly 4 months, he's 17.5 pounds (8 kilograms) of fur, muscle, claws and teeth. He's gaining about a pound a week — he's bigger than either of his siblings were at

the same age — and is hitting every developmental milestone.

He's one of four pandas at the Smithsonian's National Zoo, along with his mother, Mei Xiang, his father, Tian Tian, and his 2-year-old sister, Bao Bao. The pandas belong to China, and after they turn 4, Bao Bao and then Bei Bei will return to

China and join the breeding program there.

Giant pandas are endangered, with roughly 1,800 living in the wild and 350 in captivity, which means Bei Bei and his sister are being counted on to help perpetuate the species.

Zoo staffers hope that by the time Bei Bei leaves, they'll have another young panda to care for. Mei Xiang, who has given birth to three surviving cubs, is scheduled to be artificially inseminated again in 2017. Pandas have been the star attraction at the National Zoo since China gave the United States a pair of the black-and-white bears after President Richard Nixon's historic visit in 1972. Efforts to breed them in captivity were long met with frustration, but the survival rate has improved dramatically in the past 20 years.

Throughout his nearly 30-minute appearance before reporters and photographers, keepers and veterinarians stroked Bei Bei's thick, bristly fur, and he protested only when they tried to open his mouth to count his teeth. □

Beijing issues second smog red alert of the month

BEIJING (AP) — China's capital Beijing issued its second smog red alert of the month on Friday, triggering vehicle restrictions and forcing schools to close.

A wave of smog is due to settle over the city of 22.5 million from Saturday to Tuesday. Levels of PM2.5, the smallest and deadliest airborne particles, are set to top 500, according to the official Beijing government website.

That is more than 20 times the level that is considered

safe by the World Health Organization.

Half the city's cars will be forced off the road on any given day, while barbecue grills and other outdoor smoke sources will be banned and factory production restricted. Schools will close and residents advised to avoid outdoor activities.

On Friday afternoon, the air was relatively good, with a PM2.5 reading of about 80 and the sun shining brightly over the city.

However, visibility in some

parts of Beijing will fall to less than 500 meters (1,600 feet) on Tuesday when the smog will be at its worst, the city government website said. An almost complete lack of wind would contribute to the smog's lingering over the city, it said.

Smog red alerts are triggered when levels of PM2.5 above 300 are forecast to last for more than 72 hours. Although the four-tier smog warning system was launched two years ago, Beijing had not issued a red alert until last week, draw-

ing accusations that it was ignoring serious bouts of smog to avoid the economic costs. Some residents have defied the odd-even license plate number traffic restrictions and complained about the need to stay home from work to accompany housebound children. Others have used the break from school to travel to places where the air is better, while many who stay wear air filtering face masks and run air purifiers in their homes.

Scientific studies attri-

bute 1.4 million premature deaths per year to China's smog, or almost 4,000 per day. Most of the pollution is blamed on coal-fired power plants, along with vehicle emissions, building construction and factory work resulting from three decades of headlong economic expansion. While Beijing's smog gets the most attention, the scourge strikes much of northern China on a regular basis, sometimes forcing the closure of highways because of poor visibility. □

'Force Awakens' pulls in record \$57M on opening night



This photo provided by Disney/Lucasfilm shows Daisy Ridley, right, as Rey, and BB-8, in a scene from the film, "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," directed by J.J. Abrams. The movie has set a box office record with an estimated \$57 million from Thursday night shows. (Film Frame/Disney/Lucasfilm via AP)

JAKE COYLE
AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" has set a box office record with an estimated \$57 million from Thursday night shows. The Walt Disney Co.'s estimate on Friday easily sur-

passed the previous Thursday night record of \$43.5 million by 2011's "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2." The movie's international rollout, which began Wednesday, has brought in a total of \$72.7 million. That includes the biggest sin-

gle day ever in the United Kingdom, where it made an estimated \$14.4 million. The film cost about \$200 million to make, according to industry estimates. The early figures suggest "The Force Awakens" is on course to exceed the record domestic opening of

"Jurassic World," which debuted with \$208.8 million in June. J.J. Abrams' seventh chapter in George Lucas's space saga arrived with the kind of hoopla and anticipation that few films have ever matched. Costumed, lightsaber-wielding fans have lined up around

blocks, from Jakarta to Paris, to be among the first to see "The Force Awakens" (and hopefully avoid any spoilers from its intensely guarded plot).

In North America, the film sold a record \$100 million worth of presale tickets before Thursday previews began at approximately 7 p.m. EST. Playing in 4,134 theaters, "The Force Awakens" is the widest December release ever attempted.

3-D and Imax screenings are helping to propel the record gross. Disney said that 47 percent of the box office came from 3-D showings and \$5.7 million from Imax screens.

A lot is riding on the film for Disney, which paid \$4.06 billion for Lucasfilm in 2012. Sequels and spinoffs are already in development for years to come, not to mention an entire corner of Disneyland devoted to the franchise. □

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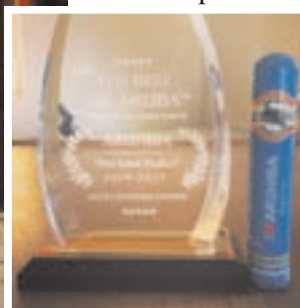
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ORANJESTAD- Benjamin Petrocchi, a true native Aruban started the newest export product of Aruba, locally produced hand rolled cigars called "Aruhiba". These cigars are produced and cultivated in Aruba. Petrocchi always had a interest in the cigar business and has also sold Premium Cuban Cigars, and now he is growing his own tobacco crops. After many attempts and trips to Santo Domingo and Cuba, he started his own production and cultivation of Aruhiba Cigars in Aruba. The whole process took him 10 years to perfect. Petrocchi dedication to the cigars is important for the moulding and process of making a perfect cigar which takes a long time. Their handmade cigar box is specially designed with their "Aruhiba" logo. Petrocchi considers Aruhiba as a promotion for Aruba through its fine cigars. The company sells Aruhiba to the international markets as well. Visit their retail store located in front of the Historic Dutch Windmill in front of the RIO Hotel, with any purchase of \$20 and up you receive a free "Aruhiba" cigar or ask for their gift box of 5 cigars get 1 FREE for only \$37. They open from Monday to Saturday from 9 am till 6:30 pm and on Sundays from 10 am to 4 pm. Aruhiba cigars are now available at the gift stores in your resort and at well-known cigar stores. For their complete selection and attractive by the box prices visit their retail store. Tours are also



Owner Benjamin Petrocchi



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Meek Mill faces potential prison time over parole violations

MARYCLAIRE DALE

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A judge appears likely to send rapper Meek Mill back behind bars early next year for a steady stream of probation violations, most involving his failure to keep the court aware of his erratic travels. Mill offered emotional testimony this week about his rudderless childhood in gritty North Philadelphia,

while girlfriend Nicki Minaj and various managers pledged to keep him on track. But Common Pleas Judge Genece Brinkley, who had spared him state prison in a 2009 drug and gun case, had heard it all before. "How many times am I supposed to give him a second chance?" she asked, concluding that probation may no longer be "appropriate." She ordered him



Nicki Minaj, left, and Meek Mill appear onstage together at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles. Minaj promised to keep boyfriend Meek Mill on the straight and narrow as a judge threatened jail over his latest parole infractions. (Photo by Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP)



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STAR WARS
HARRISON FORD | MARK HAMILL
MON-FRI 6:15 | 9:15
SAT, SUN & HOL 3:15 | 6:15 | 9:15

STAR WARS
HARRISON FORD | MARK HAMILL
MON-THURS 5:30 | 8:30
FRI 5:30 | 8:30 | 11:30
SAT 2:25 | 5:30 | 8:30 | 11:30
SUN & HOL 2:25 | 5:30 | 8:30

SISTERS
AMY POEHLER | TINA FEY
WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES
MON-THURS 4:15 | 6:30 | 9:25
FRI 4:15 | 6:30 | 9:25 | 12:05
SAT 1:15 | 4:15 | 6:30 | 9:25 | 12:05
SUN & HOL 1:15 | 4:15 | 6:30 | 9:25

KEET & ROEN
MAMOUN ELYOUNOUSHI | NATHALIE MESKENS
WITH DUTCH SUBTITLES
MON-THURS 5:30 | 7:30
FRI 5:30 | 7:30
SAT 3:30 | 5:30 | 7:30
SUN & HOL 3:30 | 5:30 | 7:30

IN THE HEART OF THE SEA
CHRIS HEMSWORTH | CILLIAN MURPHY
WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES
MON-THURS 3:50 | 6:30 | 9:10
FRI-SAT 3:50 | 6:30 | 9:10 | 11:50
SUN & HOL 3:50 | 6:30 | 9:10

CREED
MICHAEL B. JORDAN | SYLVESTER STALLONE
WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES
MON-THURS 3:55 | 6:20 | 9:10
FRI-SAT 3:30 | 6:20 | 9:10 | 12:05
SUN & HOL 3:30 | 6:20 | 9:10

THE NIGHT BEFORE
JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT | SETH ROGEN
WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES
MON-THURS 9:30
FRI-SAT 9:30 | 11:50
SUN & HOL 9:30

THE GOOD DINOSAUR
JEFFREY WRIGHT | FRANCES MCDORMAND
WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES
MON-FRI 4:30 | 6:45
SAT, SUN & HOL 2:15 | 4:30 | 6:45

THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY PART 2
JENNIFER LAWRENCE | JOSH HUTCHERSON
MON-THURS 9:00
FRI-SAT 9:00 | 11:55
SUN & HOL 9:00

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not to work or perform before the Feb. 5 sentencing. A jail term would presumably stall his career following a year in which the Roc Nation-signed talent has performed with Minaj, Jay-Z and other industry A-listers, and issued his second studio album, "Dreams Worth More than Money." Mill served short stints in jail and home confinement following his conviction, when he could have gotten five to 10 years in prison. "The chance you gave me definitely changed my life and changed my family's life," Mill testified Thursday, explaining that he supports his mother, extended family and 4-year-old son. "If you didn't give me a chance, I probably wouldn't be at this place I'm at now." Mill, born Robert Williams,

lost his father to violence when he was 5 and left school in the tenth grade. The 28-year-old now dates one of the most famous women in entertainment. "He doesn't have a lot of structure. He can be irresponsible," Minaj, 33, testified last week. "Since I've come in his life, I think I've been working on that a little bit. ... He's just getting accustomed to being an adult." He said he has dropped old friends from his entourage to focus on his family and girlfriend. His lawyer said he and Minaj were seriously discussing marriage. The lawyer blamed the problems on the chaos of the music industry. The latest rules required Mill to get travel vouchers before he leaves town and meet with his probation officer in Philadelphia every 60 days.

"He's not a person who knows how to keep schedules. He's not an accountant. He's an artist," argued his latest lawyer, Frank DeSimone. "And those people are notoriously slipshod (at organization)." The violations include Mill's performances at a New York benefit concert last month and, according to prosecutors, efforts to meet up in various cities with Minaj. Brinkley also raised questions about a suspicious sample during a drug test. Mill denied trying to thwart the test or taking any drugs. He also dissed the case prosecutor in a rap song, a decision he now calls "immature." Mill told the judge he was so concerned about the rules that he missed being at his mother's bedside after a recent surgery in New Jersey.

Chadwick Boseman to play Thurgood Marshall

NEW YORK (AP) — Having already played Jackie Robinson and James Brown, Chadwick Boseman will tackle another icon in a courtroom thriller about Thurgood Marshall. Producers announced this week that Boseman will star as the legendary attorney in "Marshall," a film

to be directed by "Django Unchained" producer Reginald Hudlin. The film focuses on a case early in the career of the Supreme Court justice. It will begin production this week in Los Angeles. Boseman, who co-stars as the Black Panther in Marvel's upcoming "Captain America: Civil

War," broke out in the Robinson biopic "42," which he followed with "Get on Up." Another movie featuring Marshall as a young lawyer is in the works. Lionsgate is developing an adaptation of Gilbert King's Pulitzer Prize-winning book "The Devil in the Grove," with Anton Corbijn to direct.

AP's top songs of 2015: Bieber Bay, Beyonce

MESFIN FEKADU

AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — If The Associated Press could create its own "NOW" compilation album of 2015, this would be it. Here are the top 10 songs of the year, according to AP music editor Mesfin Fekadu:

1. "Where Are U Now," Skrillex and Diplo featuring Justin Bieber: "Where Are U Now" marked Bieber's comeback.
2. "Let It Go," James Bay: This British singer's burning single, highlighted by the guitar, is just as lovely and passionate as Ed Sheeran's "Thinking out Loud." On second thought, it's slightly better.
3. "Worth It," Fifth Harmony featuring Kid Ink: Don't even try to resist this song — Fifth Harmony came out swinging this year with an addictive track.
4. "How Deep Is Your Love," Calvin Harris and Disciples: The king of the club is this song.
5. "Ex's and Oh's," Elle King: King's scratchy vocals mixed with her badass guitar playing combine to make this tune irresistible.
6. "Trap Queen," Fetty Wap: "Trap Queen" was just the beginning of Wap's grungy, melodic style that dominated our playlists this year, along with "679," "My Way" and "Again." We were all screaming "1738."
7. "Burning House," Cam: Rising singer Cam's slow groove was country radio's most refreshing song, thanks in part to producer Jeff Bhasker (Kanye West, fun.)
8. "Rise Up," Andra Day: R&B's brightest newcomer brings on the vocals with her anthemic, motivational single.
9. "Runnin' (Lose It All)," Naughty Boy featuring Beyoncé and Arrow Benjamin: Oh how excited we are for new music from Beyoncé in 2016.
10. "Pablo the Blowfish," Miley Cyrus: Cyrus' piano tune about her dead blowfish is both silly and deep, and further proves that she's wacky and talented. □

Review: Chris Brown is multi-dimensional on 'Royalty'

MELANIE J. SIMS

Associated Press

Chris Brown, "Royalty" (RCA)

Chris Brown knows his strengths, and on his seventh studio album, "Royalty," the singer plays to them with solid success. It's a feat worth applauding, considering how disparate the multi-dimensional sing-

er's specialties seem to be. There's the electro-dance stuff: the contagiously upbeat "Fine By Me"; the mid-tempo and cool "Zero"; and the Tayla Parx-assisted "Anyway," with its arena-filling waves of synth sounds. There's also the electronic-influenced "A Little More (Wake Me Up)." "You inspire me, gimme a

reason to keep on," Brown sings to his daughter, Royalty, who appears on the album cover, and inspired the release's title as well. It's good, radio friendly pop music that seems as natural to Brown as traditional R&B fare, which he delivers with expertise on the old school-leaning "Make Love"; the sweet but slightly explicit

"Back to Sleep"; and the steamy, Keith Sweat-inspired "Who's Gonna (Nobody)." Brown pushes the R&B envelope, too, linking with Dutch DJ-producer Afrojack — who worked on Brown's "Look at Me Now" — for the very sexy "Discover," with its trap-inspired production and slinky lyrics. □

Gee Bees: Musical advice for fans who have lost touch

DAVID BAUDER

AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Music journalist Jim Fusilli calls them the generationally biased, or Gee Bees. They're the folks who lose touch with popular music around the time their first grey hairs sprout, and are convinced that nothing can compare with the music of their youth.

Some are boors, no doubt. But not all have closed minds — the pressure of jobs, kids and mortgages is what caused some Gee Bees to lose their musical adventurousness.

Fusilli, a music writer at The Wall Street Journal, has made it his mission to coax such folks back into the present day through his website, ReNewMusic.net and a focused collection of his stories in the book, "Catching Up." With the holidays upon us, we asked him to recommend five albums that Gee Bees might not know but should. —Alabama Shakes,



Brittany Howard of Alabama Shakes performs at Lollapalooza in Chicago. Alabama Shakes released their second album, "Sound & Color," in April.

(Rob Grabowski/Invision/AP)

"Sound & Color." It's their second album, but "their well-deserved reputation for old-school blues, soul and rock makes it seem as if Brittany Howard and the band have been around forever," Fusilli said. Shaking things up with "a bold application of clatter, eccentricity and wit," Fusilli gives the band props for the courage to change.

—Floating Points, "Elaenia." Floating Points is actually Sam Shepherd, a classically-trained musician and DJ. His music mixes electronica, jazz, R&B and rock. In Shepherd's "highly-textured pieces, noise and beauty co-exist without conflict," Fusilli said. —Lettuce, "Crush." Lettuce's name may conjure an unappetizing lunch in-

stead of the classic funk dished up, with singer Alecia Chakour shining on a version of Bobbie Gentry's "He Made a Woman Out of Me." The album should appeal to fans of the Meters, Stuff and Tower of Power.

—Laura Marling, "Short Movie." Marling is a young (25) singer-songwriter who shows growth on a new album. She "toughens her sound for some songs with the addition of rock instrumentation, but her voice, novelistic storytelling and agile guitar remain the centerpiece," he said.

—Public Service Broadcasting, "The Race for Space." Don't be scared by the name, or the idea of a concept album about the space race between the U.S. and Soviet Union, for that matter. Fusilli said the intriguing disc mixes orchestral statements, funk, rock-edged electronica and voiceovers, including one by President John F. Kennedy. □

Puff Daddy rereleases free mixtape; readies final album

J. LANDRUM Jr.

Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Puff Daddy is close to the finish line as a recording artist.

But first, the performer wants to go out with a bang by rereleasing his well-received mixtape, "MMM (Money Making Mitch)," on iTunes on Friday. The mixtape serves as the prequel to "No Way Out 2," Puff Daddy's final album to be released next year.

"I'm just following in the footsteps of (Frank) Sinatra," said the rapper, born

Sean Combs, in an interview Wednesday. "It feels good to end something on your terms that you worked so hard to build."

"MMM" was initially released for free on Nov. 4 — the Grammy winner's 46th birthday. The mixtape garnered positive reviews and featured artists like Future, Lil Kim, Jadakiss, French Montana and others.

Combs said he felt compelled to rerelease the mixtape after hearing the "overwhelming demand" from fans and colleagues to sale it. The rerelease will

include a new interlude and two additional tracks. "I was surprised that after people had a chance to have it for free, they still want to buy it," he said. "I heard about the effect that Kendrick (Lamar) had when he let everybody hear his album for a week for free before they could buy it. It just shows that if it's quality, people have a demand for it."

After his recording career is done, Combs said he plans to travel and spend more time with his six children while plotting his next steps

in life. But he said he won't disappear completely from the music scene.

"I will always be around music," said Combs, who owns the television network Revolt.

He will hit the stage for Fox's "Pitbull's New Year's Revolution," airing live on Dec. 31 from Miami. It will also include Timbaland, "Empire" actor-singer Jussie Smollett, Earth, Wind & Fire and Austin Mahone.

After the show, Combs will host a private after-hour event to bring in the new year. □



Steven Ball, staff organist with the Historic Organ Restoration Committee, plays the console of the Boardwalk Hall organ in Atlantic City, N.J. The large openings, top right, contain rows and rows of pipes for the organ, that experts describe as the largest musical instrument on the planet. The massive organ at Boardwalk Hall hasn't functioned at its full capacity since a hurricane in 1944.

(AP Photo/Mel Evans)

Those Are Some Pipes: Immense Organ's Restoration Underway

KATHY MATHESON
Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — It's described as the largest musical instrument in the world, yet an audience can barely see it.

The historic organ at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City boasts more than 33,000 pipes, all concealed behind the walls of the cavernous auditorium best known for hosting the Miss America pageant. But the sound is robust — even while operating at only 25 percent of its capacity.

"I tell people it's sort of like a race car running on two cylinders right now," said staff organist Steven Ball. "It's also terrifying how powerful it is — even just a quarter of it. So I can't imagine what half of it is going to do."

He hopes to find out soon. The nonprofit Historic Organ Restoration Committee, which has been refurbishing the hidden gem, plans to have it functioning at 50

percent by the summer, when hundreds of organ aficionados expect to visit. The 150-ton instrument, built by the Midmer-Losh Co., hasn't been fully operational since 1944, when the Great Atlantic Hurricane swept through the seaside resort, causing flooding that ruined mechanical equipment. But for 12 years before the storm, the organ's unequalled power and tonal range represented the pinnacle of the art form, Ball said. Unfortunately, no recordings exist from that time — only written accounts that he said describe "the most impressive sound on Earth."

The organ was never completely repaired, according to Ball. It was played sporadically until the 1970s, when, he said, it largely fell silent because of electrical problems. Deterioration ensued due to neglect, disuse and accidental pipe damage caused by contractors working in the hall.

Yet over the past several years, the restoration committee's painstaking efforts have partially revived the instrument. Now Ball, who also serves on the group, is trumpeting its 10-year funding campaign, which so far has raised \$2 million of its \$16 million goal.

The money will help refurbish the Midmer-Losh — which is currently played during Miss America, on building tours and at other hall events — and a smaller W.W. Kimball organ in an adjacent ballroom.

Beth Ryan, coordinator at the Atlantic City Historical Museum, said she was blown away when she first heard the main organ.

"The air around me got very electric — the sound just filled the room," Ryan said. "It's like a time machine. It really does transport you back into a different era." Organs used to be essential equipment for large theaters and municipal auditoriums, providing

soundtracks for stage shows and movies in a world before amplifiers.

Ball described organists as one-man orchestras, creating music from a range of sounds — trumpets, strings, piano — in the same way an artist mixes paint on a palette. The sound palette built at Boardwalk Hall remains unparalleled because of its stellar cohort of designers, he said.

James Weaver, executive director of the Organ Historical Society, said his group is excited to see the instrument's inner workings during a planned visit July 1. It's like going into an old steamship or something," Weaver said. "You just marvel ... how did they even manage to do all of this?" So far, restoration funds have included private donations, as well as federal and state grants. Hundreds of pipes were recently sent to be overhauled at Oyster Pipe Works in Louisville, Ohio, and workers in-house

have been replacing critical mechanical elements. Some organ fans fear Atlantic City's economic struggles — including several casinos closing in recent years — have hampered their ability to attract widespread attention and support. Ball hopes people will see the bigger picture. The former University of Michigan music professor insists the mammoth project is not simply a nostalgic quest to fix "an antiquated piece of sound equipment." When fully functional, he said, the organ will be "truly capable of changing the public's perception of what the art means." Former church organist Nancy Herb of Hatfield, Pennsylvania, heard Ball play a 30-minute recital after taking a recent behind-the-scenes tour.

"It's just fantastic, all the intricacies of it," Herb said. "You feel like you're in heaven — heavenly music." □